



New Jersey Chapter

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New Jersey Chapter of Black Psychologists COVID-19 statement

January 1, 2020 ushered in a new year and a new millennium. As we crossed the threshold of 2019 into 2020, music played, bells rang, champagne glasses clanged, and people hugged. Even with a faint awareness of a remote outbreak of something called coronavirus in China, many envisioned with optimism, hope, and determination all the new beginnings that 2020 would bring. No one could have imagined that after only three months, America would be brought to her knees in the grips of an epic health pandemic.

Now a household word, COVID-19, is an ominous threat that has interrupted lives and invoked fear, anxiety, grief, loss, and feelings of helplessness all over the world. COVID-19 has impacted every system of this country. It has interrupted academic institutions, stymied the flow of justice, devastated the economy, and completely overwhelmed the healthcare system. Access to recreation, religious service, and even vital resources such as food are strained. Cultural norms, tradition, and ceremony related to weddings, funerals, childbirth, graduations, family gatherings, and celebrations of all kinds have been disrupted. There is no avenue of life that has been spared from the wrath of COVID-19.

Many people of African descent make up the working class and have no financial choice but to continue to work amidst COVID-19. They find themselves in harm's way so the majority can stay safe and shelter in place. This coupled with other systemic inequity cause people of African descent to suffering with significantly higher rates of COVID-19. Additionally, Black people have some of the highest rates of diabetes and asthma, making us more vulnerable to this virus. The reality of disproportionality is certainly not an anomaly for people of African descent. Historically, the Black experience has been marked by oppression, structural racism, and health disparities. "It seems as though the essence of being Black means to be at risk," said NJABPsi secretary, Mallory Everett, Psy.D. The only silver lining seems to be that COVID-19 has illuminated systemic failures and deficits that have long been overlooked or deliberately ignored.

Now the cry is urging us to brace for, 'next pandemic; widespread mental health crisis'. An old adage comes to mind, 'when white folks catch a cold, Black folks get pneumonia'. As an organization of African-centered psychologists, we recognize the psychological burden of COVID-19 and the increased need for culturally competent service provisions. All over the country, black psychologists have responded to the increased need. NJABPsi urges us to remember that to take

care of our clients we must take care of ourselves. Taking moments for deep breathing, prayer, and/or meditation is more important now than ever.

Through our unity and tapping into the wisdom from our African ancestral roots, we have all that we need to get through this pandemic. Our maafa taught us that we are overcomers. Tenacity is embedded in our soul and spirit. We remind you today to remain hopeful and to walk with the resilience, fortitude, and boldness of our ancestors.

NJABPSI Executive Board