Disrupting Racism in Medicine to Achieve Lasting Health Equity
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National Medical Fellowships
Introduction

Structural and systemic racism contribute to and proliferate the social and political determinants of health. The vestiges of this historic and present-day racism impact the multifaceted experience of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) in this country. Wealth inequality, food insecurity, the lack of safe and affordable housing, environmental injustice, racial trauma, unequal access to quality education, political disenfranchisement, under-investment in communities, ever-present threats of state violence, and more fuel health disparities among BIPOC populations.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) notes that Black women are three times as likely to die from a pregnancy-related cause than white women. The Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health found in 2018 that African Americans were 30% more likely to die from heart disease than non-Hispanic whites. The organization also found that African American adults are 40% more likely to have high blood pressure than non-Hispanic whites, yet they are less likely to have their blood pressure under control.

Access to quality health care, especially culturally competent care, is a critical dimension of this problem. According to the Kaiser Permanente Foundation and ESPN’s 2020 Survey on Race and Health, one in five Black adults said they had personally experienced race-based discrimination in health care in the past year. Thirty-seven percent of Black women with children under age 18 said they had been treated unfairly based on their race while receiving health care for themselves or a family member in the past year.

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the urgency for action. The CDC reported that American Indian and Alaska Native, Black, and Hispanic people have experienced disproportionate rates of infection, illness, and death due to COVID-19.

National Medical Fellowships (NMF) is taking bold and decisive action to build a more equitable future for communities of color in the U.S. With its partners, NMF is vigorously investing in the development of health care leaders who will be laser-focused on eliminating unnecessary and preventable health disparities. Equity-minded health professionals from the very communities that endure the highest levels of health inequity in this nation are urgently needed to address the historical and present-day causes of well-earned mistrust in the health care system.

National Medical Fellowships (NMF) is doubling down on its historic mission to provide scholarships and support students underrepresented in medicine.

Since its founding, NMF has been providing scholarships to BIPOC students aspiring to be health care providers across areas of practice. Over time, NMF has extended support not only to medical students but also to students seeking to serve in other critical roles in the health care workforce.

Today, NMF works to expand access to education in health care professions, strengthen partnerships with institutions providing this education, and increase a sense of belonging for BIPOC students by enhancing its financial, communal, and emotional support. NMF also offers resources for physicians and other providers already working in health care and seeks to diversify clinical research. To ensure that clinical research findings benefit all populations, NMF works to increase the number of BIPOC researchers leading clinical investigations and diversify participants in clinical research. In these ways, NMF unabashedly disrupts the systems and structures that erect barriers to talented and committed BIPOC students and providers underrepresented in health care who possess a desire to aid communities made vulnerable by historic disinvestment and inequity.

VISION
NMF envisions a diverse health care workforce that exemplifies the leadership, education, commitment, and cultural competency necessary to achieve health equity for all.

MISSION
NMF's mission is to provide scholarships and support for underrepresented minority students in medicine and the health professions.

COMMITMENT
Founded in 1946, NMF was one of America's first diversity organizations. Today, NMF remains the only national organization advancing health equity at the intersection of the health-wealth gap.

NMF provides scholarships to BIPOC students underrepresented in health care and increases diversity in clinical trials. Its primary goal is to advance equity of opportunity in medicine and equity of access to culturally competent, high-quality health care. By increasing the number of BIPOC clinical leaders and changing the face of medicine, we will achieve health equity and eliminate health disparities.

We believe nothing should stand in the way of aspiring BIPOC clinical leaders in their quest to achieve health equity. To advance this core commitment, NMF is proud to share seven pillars of its strategic framework, all of which support its foundational mission of providing scholarships and support to students underrepresented in medicine.
NMF Strategic Pillars

NMF is dismantling the systemic racism that drives health disparities and committing itself to advancing an agenda for lasting change. This strategy is founded on seven pillars.

1. **Build an Endowment for a Sustainable Future**

2. **Advance Thought Leadership**

3. **Engage in Impactful Policy Partnerships**

4. **Diversify Clinical Research**

5. **Launch a Robust Mentorship Network**

6. **Expand Focus to Include Behavioral Health**

7. **Develop a Strong and Comprehensive Student Pathway**

Learn more at nmfonline.org/strategy
Build an Endowment to Expand Scholarships and Secure a Sustainable Future

There is an enduring need for NMF’s work to advance health equity, and a large and permanent endowment will provide a reliable source of income for this work in perpetuity. With it, NMF will be able to count on annual endowment distributions for its scholarships and charitable work, and it will enjoy long-term fiscal stability.

This enhanced financial viability will make it possible for NMF to focus on our core mission and provide leadership with the flexibility to meet unexpected challenges and take advantage of new opportunities.

This expanded endowment will also significantly increase the size and quantity of scholarships we offer, further expanding the pathway of BIPOC health care professionals. This steady source of income will ensure that more students can rely on a baseline level of support from NMF throughout their educational journey.

- We will dramatically increase our endowment.
- We will increase the size and number of NMF’s annual service-learning, need-based, and merit-based scholarships.
- We will ensure that our endowment is professionally managed to maximize investment yield while protecting the principal.
**Advance Thought Leadership**

NMF has been driving the solution to achieving health equity for 75 years. We unapologetically raise our voice about the need for affordable access, inclusive practices, and equitable outcomes in health care.

We highlight the urgency of meeting the unique needs of communities made vulnerable, providing access to primary and preventive care, and addressing the social and political determinants of health. We call for diversity in clinical research, a recognition of the impact of racial trauma on health, and the requisite dismantling of structural and systemic racism.

We approach this work with laser focus and through a lens of racial equity and social justice. By building a health care workforce reflective of the communities it serves, NMF is ensuring that those who are presently underserved by today’s health care system will be able to access high quality health services grounded in an ethos of cultural competency. NMF has been quietly advancing the quest for health equity for decades. It is time for NMF to take its well-earned position at center stage as the preeminent organization leading the way toward greater health equity for all.

- Through the thought leadership of our president and CEO, members of the senior executive team, alumni, and board of directors, we will embrace our 75-year legacy of advancing health equity and rise to our rightful position of influence, accelerating the changes so desperately needed.

- We will unapologetically speak about medicine’s harmful exploitation of populations made vulnerable, including the BIPOC community, incarcerated people, people with developmental or intellectual disabilities, and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ+) community. We will share how we are remedying this legacy of harm by advancing representatives from mistreated communities into health care leadership.

- We will share our knowledge, beliefs, and advocacy for systemic and structural change through co-authored publications, media appearances, conference participation, op-eds, news releases, and more. We will engage in, contribute to, and lead the national conversation about advancing health equity.

- We will leverage this visibility in the public conversation to increase funding for existing scholarships and establish new scholarships for BIPOC students wishing to enter medicine and related health professions.
Engage in Impactful Policy Partnerships

To advance the transformational change needed to eliminate the systemic and structural racism that contributes to the proliferation of racial disparities in health care, NMF is building an expansive coalition of partners.

Together with these partners, we will develop impactful programs and policies in the private and public sectors, within organizations and industries, and at the local, state, and national levels. NMF seeks to engage many more partners who share our interests in diversity, health equity and disparities, inclusion, access to care, vaccine hesitancy, and other issues.

This is just the beginning. NMF also casts a clarion call out to our alumni network, which stands more than 32,000 strong and is growing every year, to help fight for racial and social justice in health care. Working in solidarity with traditional and non-traditional partners, as well as alumni, NMF stands ready to collaborate on issue-centered coalition building to raise public awareness about policies and programs that reduce health inequities and dismantle racism in health care. Our strategy engages stakeholders in government, education, and the corporate sector. It prioritizes meaningful alliances with professional associations, nonprofit organizations, and policy decision-makers who share our vision for ensuring every person in this country has equitable access to culturally competent, quality care. Our ambition is bold, audacious, and possible.
Engage in Impactful Policy Partnerships (continued)

- We will partner with the entities that deliver health care services, manufacture pharmaceuticals, provide behavioral health treatment, offer managed care plans, address the social and political determinants of health, and render other goods and services.

- We will build transformative relationships with elected and appointed policy decision-makers to advance public policies that tackle health disparities.

- We will forge alliances with educators of children and young adults, health care professionals, and scientists.

- We will ally and work in shared service with like-minded organizations that are committed to advancing health equity and diversifying the health care workforce.

- We will continue to deepen existing relationships with current partners, including but not limited to the Association of American Medical Colleges, American Medical Association, National Medical Association, Association of American Indian Physicians, and National Hispanic Medical Association.

- We will pursue collaborative opportunities with non-traditional partners such as the American Psychological Association, Association of Black Psychologists, Black Psychiatrists of America, American Society of Hispanic Psychiatry, National Latinx Psychological Association, and others.

- We will engage in new policy partnerships with entities squarely focused on health policy, health equity, and the intersection of the health-wealth gap.

- We will build a big tent and bring aboard viable entities advancing policy and practicum work around diversity in clinical research, diversity in medicine, inclusion and belonging in medical education, and medical career development—as well as others directly supportive of NMF’s mission.

- We will leverage our platforms to amplify impacted community voices on matters such as vaccine hesitancy, the unacceptable rates of mortality of Black and Brown mothers during childbirth, the realities of racial trauma, and solutions that can be brought to clinical infrastructure to address these pressing concerns.
NMF is expanding its ambitions and impact from supporting aspiring and practicing BIPOC physicians and health professionals into the research frontiers of medicine. Through several innovative programs that offer clinical research career pathways, professional development, and mentoring, NMF is providing an onramp for physicians and students underrepresented in medicine to become clinical investigators and lead community-oriented research.

There is an urgent need to increase cultural competency in clinical trials and begin to heal the well-earned mistrust that communities harmed by inequity and mistreatment have for the health care establishment. By diversifying the investigators who lead clinical research, NMF is opening the door for individuals who might otherwise never consider participating in a research study. Increasing underrepresented patient participation in clinical research will help lead to therapeutics and disease prevention efforts that have greater efficacy across all populations.

To accomplish these aims, NMF leads an expanding array of programs that provide clinical research opportunities to diverse medical students and physicians—and support their efforts to lead community-oriented clinical research.

Diversity Matters

Clinical research in medicine lacks diverse investigators, and far too often, it fails to inclusively select participants. A 2021 study published in Future Oncology found that 84.2% of clinical trial participants in Phase I trials of biopharmaceutical oncology agents were white, and there was minimal representation of Blacks/African Americans (7.3%), Asians (3.4%), Hispanics/Latinos (2.8%), or other race/ethnicity groups (2.3%).

Racial Diversity of Clinical Trial Participants in Phase I Trials

- **White**: 84.2%
- **Blacks/African Americans**: 7.3%
- **Asians**: 3.4%
- **Hispanics/Latinos**: 2.8%
- **Other Racial/Ethnic Groups**: 2.3%

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Diversify Clinical Research (continued)

With the support of Janssen, the Pharmaceutical Companies of Johnson & Johnson, and Merck, NMF launched the National Medical Fellowships Diversity in Clinical Trials Research program in 2021. It provides physicians with the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed to engage in clinical trial research. It also offers ongoing opportunities for mentoring and networking that can help physicians successfully build a career focus in clinical research.

Clinical research is a critical area of investment and leadership for NMF.

- We will engage new funders and partners to expand our impact in advancing BIPOC-led medical research that is inclusive of all populations—particularly of members of the BIPOC community.
- We will offer mentorship and networking programming to support diverse clinical investigators in advancing their research and careers.
- We will engage the alumni of our scholarships and clinical research programs to call for diversity in research within their institutions and specialties.
- We will position NMF as a recognized leader of a national effort to diversify clinical research and eliminate health disparities.
Launch a Robust Mentorship Network

NMF is building a formal mentorship program that will make it easier for alumni and students to connect, receive support, and learn from one another. The goal is to offer a wide array of mentorship opportunities by program specialty and geographic region.

Studies, including a 2013 Academic Medicine literature review about mentoring in academic medical centers, show that mentorship and networking richly support career advancement and professional resiliency—and emphatically for those underrepresented in medicine. The need is urgent. Health care is a challenging field, but BIPOC practitioners carry with them the burden of a lifetime of racial trauma, while also experiencing ongoing racism from colleagues and patients.

Traditional medical school funding practices have made it challenging for NMF to connect with its alumni. Historically, some NMF scholarships were awarded by educational institutions as part of financial aid packages, so scholars often did not know their education had been supported by NMF. To be a part of a community, one must know one belongs. While NMF has contact information for roughly 15,000 alumni, its total alumni population numbers more than 32,000 and continues to expand. This untapped pool of alumni offers exciting opportunities for growing engagement and deepening the reach of the mentorship network.

◆ We will empower NMF’s National Alumni Council and Young Leaders Council to create a caring and connected network of alumni. NMF will engage its alumni and scholars to provide them with robust racial-informed care supports, enhanced networking, career guidance, and life and leadership essentials.

◆ We will build opportunities by specialty for alumni and students to connect, share knowledge, and advance their careers.

◆ We will explore digital platforms to facilitate virtual learning, career advancement, debt management, retirement planning, the business of doctoring, networking, community building, and other matters.

◆ We will recognize and call attention to employers of choice for our scholars and alumni. These institutions and health care systems will have demonstrated track records of achieving diversity through recruitment, retention, and matriculation efforts, as well as strong investments in creating inclusive environments of belonging.

◆ We will formalize and implement a volunteer protocol to govern alumni and volunteer engagement, and to set clear expectations around roles, responsibilities, and best practices.

◆ We will engage data-enrichment services and our alumni network to find and locate alumni and invite BIPOC medical providers to discover if they were a beneficiary of NMF support.

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**Focus on Behavioral Health and Wellbeing**

Racial trauma harms the wellbeing of the BIPOC community, and NMF is committed to broadening our efforts to care for the mind as well as the body.

Far too many behavioral health providers fail to recognize experiences of racism as traumatic—or even inquire about experiences of racism. BIPOC behavioral health providers can offer a unique treatment perspective that includes the impacts of racism because they encounter racism in their own lived experience. Additionally, some choose racial trauma and racial violence as an area of specialty.

The American Psychiatric Association’s latest edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) is the field’s standard classification of mental disorders using a common language and shared criteria. It does not identify racial trauma as its own mental health condition; rather, it categorizes it as a subset of post-traumatic stress disorder. Many experts attribute this bias and minimization of racial trauma to a lack of diversity in the field and its Eurocentric orientation. NMF will stand with the well-respected recognized experts in the field advocating for its inclusion in the DSM as a viable mental health concern.

This exclusion is creating a health care crisis. Racial trauma can manifest through post-traumatic stress disorder, suicide, substance abuse, anxiety, and many other diagnoses. It also can contribute to a high adverse childhood event (ACE) score, and those with high ACE scores have been associated with poorer health later in life, according to a 2019 study published in *PLoS One*.

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**Strategic Framework**

**Expand Focus on Behavioral Health and Wellbeing (continued)**

NMF is committed to providing access to behavioral health education for aspiring psychiatrists and other therapists. This is the surest way to ensure that BIPOC communities can access the mental health care they need and deserve.

- We will care for the individuals who serve on the frontlines of health care, especially during a global pandemic that is devastating Black and Brown communities and in our hotly divisive society rife with racial tension. Understanding the challenges that BIPOC physicians and health professionals face with the individual, structural, and systemic racism that is endemic to society and health care today, NMF will develop programs and an array of supports for our scholars and alumni.

- We will fund new fellowships for BIPOC scholars studying to become practitioners of behavioral health.

- We will collaborate with behavioral health education programs and professional associations to raise awareness about NMF and its commitment to building a diverse workforce that serves the mental health needs of BIPOC communities.

- We will raise awareness of the reality of racial trauma and its significant and harmful impact on individuals and communities.

- We will communicate the importance of overcoming the stigma that exists in many BIPOC communities around seeking access to behavioral health supports.

- We will focus on the wellbeing of the BIPOC health care workforce and build impactful programs that support our scholars and alumni through a racial trauma-informed lens.
Develop a Strong and Comprehensive Student Pathway

The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) estimates the U.S. will face a physician shortage of as many as 124,000 doctors by 2034.9 Meanwhile, the U.S. Census Bureau predicts the nation’s population will continue to grow and age during that same period.

The population is estimated to increase by more than 10% by 2032, and the population over the age of 65 will grow by 48%. BIPOC communities who already face a lack of access to health care will be further impacted by this predicted shortage. Thus, it is imperative that NMF play a leading role in rapidly expanding the pathway of secondary and college students who seek health care as a career. We must support them in their journey—to and through—medical school or graduate school.

According to the Education Advisory Board, 40% of Black students and 37% of Latino students switch out of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) majors before earning a degree.10 The National Science Board’s July 2021 Science & Engineering Indicators report on Elementary and Secondary STEM Education found notable differences in STEM achievement scores across socioeconomic status, race, and ethnicity. Asian and white student scores were up to 53 points higher than the scores of students in the other groups, which the report identified as Black, Hispanic, American Indian or Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. Computer and information literacy scores followed similar patterns. The report noted that “schools with high minority or high poverty” had STEM teachers with less experience.11

NMF’s multipronged strategy is built on a prototype co-designed partnership model that will expand over time. We are engaging with schools of medicine and graduate education, community colleges, state and local school districts and governments, corporations, nonprofits, and both “grasstop” and grassroots community groups to advance this work.

◆ We will establish prototype programs utilizing social design methodologies with state and local school districts, policy decision-makers, colleges and universities, schools of medicine, corporations, nonprofits, and communities to build the pathway of BIPOC students pursuing careers in medicine and behavioral health.

◆ We will inform BIPOC children and young adults about the exciting possibilities of becoming a health care provider and meeting the needs of their communities.

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NMF’s agenda is bold and daring. We are resolute in our commitment to bringing a new day in health care to this nation by dismantling centuries of structural and systemic racism woven into medicine, behavioral health care, and medical education.

We are energized in our ongoing quest to expand scholarships and resources for our extraordinary scholars of medicine. We are determined to stand for the advancement of health equity, the diversification of the health care workforce, and the achievement of racial and social justice in medicine for communities made vulnerable.

We invite you to join us.

Learn more at nmfonline.org
@nmfonline

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