APA urges HHS to push for partnership to address pandemic

Citing the need to provide urgent information on the impact of COVID-19 on key populations and produce data to target behavioral health interventions to vulnerable populations, the American Psychological Association (APA) is urging the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to establish within the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention a public-private partnership to address the pandemic.

The APA in an April 14 letter to the administration has asked the partnership “to coordinate with state and local public health authorities to collect, disaggregate, and report on data related to COVID-19 to more effectively address this current pandemic and any future outbreaks.”

The APA added, “Consequently, establishing the public-private partnership is a critical public health priority. Specifically, the partnership would provide urgent information on the impact of COVID-19 on key populations and their characteristics, including socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability status, English language proficiency, nativity, and religious beliefs. Importantly this data would be integrated and cross-tabulated with existing federally-required data sets.”

“The goal is to establish a path forward that produces more usable, granular data that can inform and help target behavioral interventions to vulnerable populations to help flatten the pandemic curve,” Arthur C. Evans Jr., Ph.D., CEO of the APA, told MHW. “This will require coordination among various state and local public health authorities to collect, disaggregate and report on data related to COVID-19 to more effective-
The goal for the public-private partnership is to address the reported disparities that have been found in ethnic groups who are dying in high numbers from this virus, said Evans. “Behavioral science offers key insights into the means of viral transmission, strategies to keep individuals and communities safe and understanding the needs of populations that are at higher risk for exposure, given their specific needs and circumstances,” he said.

Evans added, “Psychological science also helps shed light on the role of bias, stigma and discrimination as factors that may exacerbate viral spread. None of these insights, however, would be possible without comprehensive surveillance and reporting of public health data.”

Will the APA take on a consulting role if a partnership develops? “We would like to be involved in any way that is a benefit to the public,” said Evans. “That includes raising awareness, acting as a convener, and identifying psychologists who are experts in the area to provide direct assistance, and, if appropriate, consulting. Our ultimate goal is to play our part in helping to reduce the dramatic disparities in the mortality rates for those who have contracted COVID-19.”

Congressional caucus introduce landmark health equity bill

The Congressional Tri-Caucus, which represents more than half of the Democratic Caucus and includes the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, Congressional Black Caucus and the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, on April 28 introduced a landmark bill to close health disparities in the United States.

The Health Equity and Accountability Act of 2020 is supported by more than 200 community and advocacy organizations, according to a news release from the Congressional Tri-Caucus.

“The coronavirus pandemic is exposing the deep inequities in health care — a reality my community has experienced for decades,” said Congressman Jesús García (D-Ill.). “We can all get the virus—but too many families in my community don’t have access to a doctor. The infection counts show, without a doubt, that Latino, African American and immigrant communities are suffering more from coronavirus than others.”

García added, “This [is] wrong; people’s health outcomes should not be determined by their zip code. This is why I am proud to introduce the Health Equity and Accountability Act (HEAA), which will address the harmful inequality in our health care system. Now is the time to act.”

“UnidosUS is proud to stand with Representative Jesús ‘Chuy’ García and the Congressional Tri-Caucus to introduce the Health Equity and Accountability Act of 2020,” said Janet Murguía, president and CEO of UnidosUS, previously known as the National Council of La Raza. She added, “If the current public health and economic crises and their disproportionate harm on communities of color teach us anything, it is this: We can no longer look to the same old playbook to respond to a public health crisis or make future investments in our health system. It’s time to write a new book and HEAA...”