

# Systemic racism exists in healthcare, so it's time to take responsibility and invest in solutions

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As protests for racial justice take place across the country, Regenstrief

vice president for faculty development and nationally recognized public health expert, Aaron Carroll, M.D., details the systemic racism present in healthcare and urges immediate action to address the inequities that are killing Black Americans.

Dr. Carroll, who is also an associate professor at Indiana University School of Medicine, wrote an article published online in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* Health Forum. In it, Dr. Carroll pointed out that Black people face roadblocks in every aspect of healthcare. He cited evidence that Black individuals have higher levels of chronic illnesses compared to white individuals and are treated differently, often worse, by the United States healthcare system.

He wrote, "It is time to stop wasting time and money proving that disparities exist. It is clear that they do, and pointing out the problem is easy. It is time to do something about it, which is infinitely harder."

The COVID-19 pandemic has accentuated the different levels of systemic racism in healthcare, Dr. Carroll argued. Black persons are dying of the virus at rates twice the rate one would expect based on their share of the U.S. population. Chronic conditions like diabetes or heart disease, which are more common in Black persons, lead to more severe cases of COVID-19. Black individuals are also more likely to hold low-paying but "essential" jobs and travel on public transit, which are just two examples of how they are exposed to more risks.

"As efforts to contain the COVID-19 pandemic continue after protests subside, it is essential to recognize that systemic [racism](#) kills Black persons through poor health as much as or even more than police brutality. It does so because society tolerates a system that sees them as expendable, even as it labels them essential," Dr. Carroll wrote.

He called on the U.S. [healthcare](#) system to acknowledge it is responsible

for much of the [poor health](#) of Black individuals.

Dr. Carroll called for investment in public health to improve access to healthy foods and exercise as well as resources to quit smoking. He advocated for changes to ensure everyone has access to health care and preventive care. He stated that it's [time](#) to train physicians to avoid implicit and explicit bias and engage in efforts to rebuild trust with Black patients at an individual and system level.

"Health Disparities Among Black Persons in the U.S. and Addressing Racism in the Health Care System" was published June 18 online.

**More information:** Health Disparities Among Black Persons in the US and Addressing Racism in the Health Care System.

[jamanetwork.com/channels/health ... /fullarticle/2767595](https://jamanetwork.com/channels/health-care/fullarticle/2767595)

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