

Racism and Bias in Dentistry

A Call to Action and Planning for Change

This document is a summation of action items and strategies generated by individuals who participated in the January 2023 Symposium, *Racism and Bias in Dentistry*, held at University of the Pacific, Arthur A. Dugoni School of Dentistry in San Francisco, California. Whether you are a student, provider, educator, researcher, leader or all of the above, you can use this as a means to challenge or change your thoughts, actions, and environment to address biases in your own practice and community.



Work through the topics at your own pace to find your strengths and weaknesses. The links included here are just a few of many resources that are available to help you jump start your journey. Feel free to share and discuss this document and your discoveries with others who may be interested in this work. Then think about how and where you can leverage your professional role and responsibilities, position, education and expertise to affect change in your community and across our profession and even within the broader system of healthcare.

Recognize our personal biases

- Reflect on where you are in this process. Enjoy the reflective writing and thinking resources below.

[Critical Reflection to Improve Learning and Practice](#)

[Reflective thinking and reflective writing video](#)

- The self-assessments below may help in determining your future direction.

[Ageism quiz](#)

[Harvard Implicit Bias Test](#)

Other [bias self-assessments](#)



Learn about the cultures in your own community

- Brainstorm ways to increase awareness of the local cultures and cultural events.
- [National Institutes of Health Clear Communication](#)
- Visit cultural centers in your area, e.g.,
 - [Tia Chucha's Centro Cultural & Bookstore](#) (San Fernando Valley, CA)
 - [Community Cultural Centers of San Francisco](#)
- Evaluate the local [health care options](#) available to patients you see who need may referrals to providers.

Practice antiracism

Practice the *active* process of identifying and challenging racism by changing systems to redistribute power in an equitable manner.

- Definitions of racism:
 - [Calgary Anti-Racism Education](#)
 - [American Association of Medical Colleges](#)

Practice self-accountability and leading by example

These are excellent guides for team-building and group discussion.

- [AMA Toolkit for small teams](#). Help your team discuss equity, racism, and set goals.
- [AMA Toolkit for large teams](#). Identify biases, engage, and work toward solutions.
- See the [ADA 5 year plan for DEI](#)

Patient advocacy

- Make a conscious effort to represent the community you serve through artwork, magazines, patient information.
- Collect demographic information from your patients to better understand your practice base and consider if it is representative of the surrounding community.
- Contact your local dental societies, public health departments and census data for demographics about the broader community in which you work or practice.

[U. S. Census information](#)

[California Dental Association](#)

- Create equitable learning environments in university/local school settings
- Improve access and comfort needs for all patients, e.g., early start, disabled, incarcerated, gender, faith based, etc.
- Reduce barriers in your own practices.
 - Reduce paperwork or help with new patient paperwork.
 - Consider office hours that better meet the needs of your patients.
 - Reconsider cancellation policies, minor changes that can increase comfort and access for those with disabilities — beyond what is required by law.
- Understand the [social determinants of health](#) and focus efforts on the social DRIVERS of health.



Patient empowerment

- Make a conscious effort to hire for diversity that best supports the patients/clients you care for or serve.
- Reach out to training programs, high schools, scholarships program, etc., if the staffing need is greater than the apparent supply.
- Identify patients who may be intimidated or fear repercussions for speaking up for themselves.
 - Consider a physical or virtual suggestion box.
 - Proactively help patients navigate insurance issues.
 - Create a “safe space” for patients to be heard without being fearful.
- Identify financial and other resources to improve access to care in your community, e.g., [transportation](#), local dental societies as referral sources.

Interpreters are required if a patient’s first language is not English or they rely on sign language.

- Confirm [phone interpretation services](#) are [HIPAA compliant](#)
- Be prepared for long wait times for phone interpreters. Plan accordingly.
- Some dental insurance programs include [language assistance](#).
 - Family members should not be interpreters, unless qualified
 - Interpreters must be [able to translate accurately](#) and not interject personal opinions or rephrase unless there is a linguistic or cultural reason to do so.
 - Be mindful of [body language](#) and possibly unintended [messaging](#) when you are not able to communicate verbally.



Pacific Center for Equity IN ORAL HEALTH CARE

Inspire, engage and empower others to participate in the work of inclusion, equity, diversity and belonging

- [Start with your practice](#), your team.
- Join study clubs and focus groups that include diverse points of view.
- Regularly participate and engage with professional organizations, local, regional, national and international e.g., [ADA](#), [ADEA](#), [AAPHD](#), [FDI](#), [WHO](#), [OPEN Oral Health](#).
- [Volunteer](#) in the community, both dental and non-dental activities to raise your community profile while learning about the needs of the community.
- [Create safe spaces](#) for difficult conversations where you practice and work.
- Identify opportunities for systems level of change — private and public spheres.
- Use data to identify the problem, influence stakeholders, change the status quo and check the impact.
- Advocate for new reimbursement models and incentives to serve diverse patient and provider needs.
- Take action: change the perception that dentistry is elective and disconnected from [overall health](#).
- Use your position to advocate for and implement broad inclusion and integration (educational, practice, electronic and financial) of dentistry in primary care.
- Engage with and learn the priorities of legislators in your area. Attend office hours, town halls and “On the Hill” events sponsored sponsored [by professional organizations](#).
- Take a [global approach](#) to advancing awareness and access to oral health care.



We're on this journey together!