

New policies adopted on segregation, homelessness

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Delegates at the 2018 AMA Annual Meeting in Chicago adopted several policies intended to alleviate chronic homelessness and racial housing segregation

More than 550,000 people experience homelessness in the U.S. on a single night, according to the 2017 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress.

Most stayed in emergency shelters or transitional housing programs, while about 35 percent stayed in unsheltered locations. Among those who are homeless, substance-use disorders and mental health problems are more prevalent than in the general population.

In an effort to alleviate chronic homelessness in the U.S., existing policy was amended by the House of Delegates calling on the AMA to “recognize that stable, affordable housing as a first priority, without mandated therapy or service compliance, is effective in improving housing stability and quality of life among individuals who are chronically homeless.”

“It is important that we take steps to improve the health and well-being of people who are facing chronic homelessness, and focusing on housing first may help do that,” said AMA Trustee Ryan J. Ribeira, MD, MPH.

Racial housing segregation

Among African-Americans and other ethnic or racial minorities, health disparities persist across socioeconomic status. With the aim of addressing racial housing segregation as an amplifier of health disparities, delegates adopted policy saying that the AMA:

- Oppose policies that enable racial housing segregation.
- Advocate continued federal funding of publicly-accessible geospatial data on community racial and economic disparities and disparities in access to affordable housing, employment,

education and health care, including but not limited to the Department of Housing and Urban Development Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing tool.

“It is critical that researchers and the public have access to geospatial data on racial segregation that persists in many communities across the country. We urge the federal government to continue funding the collection and maintenance of this publicly-available data that will be imperative to improving health outcomes in minority communities,” said AMA Trustee Willarda V. Edwards, MD.

“The AMA remains committed to eliminating health disparities in this country in order to achieve health equity and will continue to push for measures that improve the health of the nation,” Dr. Edwards said.

More Medicaid patients are visiting the emergency department than ever before because of the growing crisis of poverty, homelessness and decreased number of mental health facilities.

Read more news coverage of the 2018 AMA Annual Meeting in Chicago.