

# With bold actions, physicians earn public's trust: AMA president

NOV 16, 2019

**Brendan Murphy**

Senior News Writer

---

The public's trust in institutions such as the federal government is fading. To compound matters, data indicates that people's trust in one another is also shrinking.

When pondering those stark realities, one may wonder: Whom do people trust?

AMA President Patrice A. Harris, MD, MA, offered a response to that question during her speech to delegates at the opening session of the 2019 AMA Interim Meeting in San Diego.

"People mistrust advertising, government, the media and technology," said Dr. Harris, the Association's 174th president. Yet the public continues to rank physicians among the most trusted professions.

"How have we maintained that level of trust when we see it slipping away in other areas of society? Because of the values of our profession, and our aspirations to meet the three dimensions of trust: competency, honesty and compassion."

A key "characteristic of trustworthiness is honesty—or as my grandmama used to say: 'Truth-telling,'" Dr. Harris said.

"As physicians, we are honest with our patients—even when the news may be difficult to share or not what they were expecting. Bringing that honesty and truth-telling to bear, the AMA uses our voice to speak out for those who—for far too long—had no voice."

Dr. Harris highlighted many recent instances in which the AMA, the nation's largest physician organization, has used it to fight for the greater good.

**Taking on the anti-vaccine movement.** The AMA supports vaccine exemptions solely for medical reasons and is combating misinformation spread on social media platforms.

**Fighting against discriminatory policies.** The AMA voiced strong opposition to the Pentagon's ban on transgender troops in the military and the Trump administration's policy of separating immigrant children from their parents at the border.

**Advocating for vulnerable patients.** Based on policy adopted in the House of Delegates (HOD), the AMA recently founded the Center for Health Equity, with an aim on combating disparities in care.

**Eliminating barriers to treatment.** The AMA is pushing Congress for regulatory reform that will put patients' needs ahead of those of payers.

**Acting on the opioid epidemic.** The AMA has developed a national opioid policy road map that offers an objective analysis of what is working in fighting against the opioid epidemic at the state level, with states that are succeeding providing vigorously enforced mental health and substance-use disorder parity and access to comprehensive pain care.

### **Protecting honest conversations**

Earlier this year, the Trump administration's gag rule regarding Title X family-planning program sought to prevent physicians from providing essential information to patients, along with referrals for appropriate care. Another measure in North Dakota instructed physicians to falsely tell patients a medication abortion may be "reversible."

The AMA took legal actions to oppose both policies.

"The patient-physician relationship is the cornerstone of health care, and the trust in this relationship depends on open and honest conversations about all of our patients' health care options," Dr. Harris said.

These legal battles, Dr. Harris said, show why physicians remain trusted in trying times. So, too, does the AMA's work in combating the e-cigarette epidemic. With policy enacted calling attention to the topic at the 2018 AMA Interim Meeting, the HOD has been a leading voice against e-cigarettes.

With its advocacy in this area, the AMA is pulling "back the curtain on the dangers of e-cigarettes and vaping, working at the highest levels to sustain decades of progress on youth smoking."

In an era when distrust so often carries the day, "the AMA is just what the doctor ordered," Dr. Harris said. "We are more than a match for this moment."

That is, she concluded, “because people trust us—and because we will always strive to be worthy of their trust.”