

Law enforcement's excessive use of force is a public health issue

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Nearing the end of a year that has been indelibly marked by national unrest surrounding police killings of unarmed Black people such as George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, physicians spoke to the structural racism surrounding police brutality and a need for policing reform during the November 2020 AMA Special Meeting.

Amid the nation's racial reckoning in the wake of the deaths of Floyd and others, the AMA advocated for an end to police brutality. With passionate testimony on the topic at the Special Meeting, the AMA reinforced its commitment to changing the way the public is policed.

"The data make clear that police brutality—one manifestation of systemic racism—has significant public health consequences for impacted communities, particularly among the Black community," said AMA Board Member Willie Underwood III, MD, MSc, MPH.

"The AMA is dedicated to actively working on dismantling racist policies and practices across all of health care, and we call on stakeholders to make systemic changes to protect public health and combat the detrimental effects that racism and communal violence have on the health of the nation," Dr. Underwood said.

Black Americans are three times more likely than whites to be killed by police and account for over 40% of victims of police killings nationwide, according to a resolution presented at the Special Meeting.

The AMA House of Delegates (HOD) adopted new policy to:

- Recognize police brutality as a manifestation of structural racism that disproportionately impacts Black, Indigenous and other people of color.
- Work with interested national, state and local medical societies in a public health effort to support the elimination of excessive use of force by law-enforcement officers.

The HOD also directed the AMA to:

- | Oppose the use of racial and discriminatory profiling by law enforcement through appropriate anti-bias training, individual monitoring and other measures.
- | Advocate legislation and regulations which promote trauma-informed, community-based safety practices.