

FABBS Comments on the NIH Minority Health and Health Disparities Strategic Plan (2026-2030) - Submitted 12.28.24

Request for Information (RFI): Inviting Comments and Suggestions on the NIH Minority Health and Health Disparities Strategic Plan, 2026-2030 (Notice Number: NOT-MD-25-002)

Submitted online: <https://www.nimhd.nih.gov/about/strategic-plan/rfi.html>

December 28, 2024

The Federation of Associations in Behavioral and Brain Sciences (FABBS) represents 29 scientific societies and 60 university departments whose scientific members and faculty share a commitment to advancing knowledge in the sciences of mind, brain, and behavior.

I. Comments on Proposed Goals

1. *Advance scientific understanding of racial and/or ethnic minority health.*

FABBS recommends multidisciplinary approaches to advancing this goal, including social psychological and social cognitive. We offer the following articles as examples:

- Penner, L. A., Blair, I. V., Albrecht, T. L., & Dovidio, J. F. (2014). Reducing Racial Health Care Disparities: A Social Psychological Analysis. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 1(1), 204-212. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2372732214548430>
- Brondolo, E., Kaur, A., Seavey, R., & Flores, M. (2023). Anti-Racism Efforts in Healthcare: A Selective Review from a Social Cognitive Perspective. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 10(2), 160-170. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23727322231193963>

We also encourage this research to expand its focus to multiracial individuals' health and offer the following:

- Sanchez, D. T., Gaither, S. E., Albuja, A. F., & Eddy, Z. (2020). How Policies Can Address Multiracial Stigma. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 7(2), 115-122. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2372732220943906>

2. *Advance scientific understanding of the causes of health disparities.*

FABBS recommends looking to the brain and cognitive sciences – in addition to biological, behavioral, and clinical – to achieve this goal.

3. *Develop and test interventions to improve racial and/or ethnic minority health and/or reduce health disparities.*

FABBS emphasizes the importance of behavioral and societal interventions in addition to medical and pharmaceutical interventions when it comes to improving health and reducing health disparities. We offer the following examples:

- Higgins, S. T., Davis, D. R., & Kurti, A. N. (2017). Financial Incentives for Reducing Smoking and Promoting Other Health-Related Behavior Change in Vulnerable Populations. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 4(1), 33-40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2372732216683518>
- Balcetis, E., Cole, S., & Duncan, D. T. (2020). How Walkable Neighborhoods Promote Physical Activity: Policy Implications for Development and Renewal. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 7(2), 173-180. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2372732220939135>

4. *Promote inclusion of NIH-designated populations experiencing health disparities in NIH-funded research.*

No comment.

5. *Develop and improve scientific methods, metrics, measures, analytic tools, and technologies that support health disparities research and improve racial and/or ethnic minority health.*

No comment.

6. *Support training to enhance workforce diversity and promote career advancement of trainees and investigators.*

Behavioral sciences can play a key role in promoting workforce diversity. FABBS commends NIH for consider diversity not just within its own workforce, but within academia as well.

- Plaut, V. C. (2014). Diversity Science and Institutional Design. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 1(1), 72-80. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2372732214550164>
- Dupree, C. H., & Boykin, C. M. (2021). Racial Inequality in Academia: Systemic Origins, Modern Challenges, and Policy Recommendations. *Policy*

Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 8(1), 11-18.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/2372732220984183>

- Freeman, J. B. (2020). Measuring and Resolving LGBTQ Disparities in STEM. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 7(2), 141-148. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2372732220943232>

Additionally, recruiting behavioral and social scientists (as recommend by the Office of Science and Technology Policy’s “[Blueprint for the Use of Social and Behavioral Science to Advance Evidence-Based Policymaking](#)”) not only increases diversity in expertise but can contribute to workforce diversity, specifically in terms of increasing representation of researchers from health disparities populations.

- As noted in the NIH Council of Councils Working Group Report, “[Trans-NIH Research Opportunities in the Basic and Behavioral Social Sciences](#)”, African American/Black researchers are “represented more in research areas that include substantial basic behavioral and social sciences research” (p. 5). Furthermore, women outnumber men in the behavioral and social sciences.

7. *Strengthen the national capacity to conduct racial and/or ethnic minority health and health disparities research.*

No comment.

8. *Expand interdisciplinary capacity among community partners and collaborations to advance racial and/or ethnic minority health and health disparities science.*

No comment.

9. *Promote evidence-based community engagement and dissemination of research best practices.*

No comment.

II. Comments on Research Strategies and Scientific Areas

FABBS highlights the following research areas as important for NIH to include in this strategic plan:

1. Sleep is a critical but understudied area of health (see the NIH Council of Councils Working Group Report, “[Trans-NIH Research Opportunities in the Basic and Behavioral Social Sciences](#)”) and may be a key mechanism through which health disparities can develop. We offer the following articles on this topic:
 - Tarullo, A. R., Ewell, A. R., & Garrison, M. M. (2023). Sleep, Poverty, and Biological Stress: Mitigating Sleep Health Disparities in Early Childhood.

Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 10(2), 221-228.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/23727322231199942>

- Prather, A. A. (2023). Waking Up to the Importance of Sleep: Opportunities for Policy Makers. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 10(1), 25-32. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23727322221144651>
2. Pain is a condition with significant health disparities, both in terms of diagnosis and treatment. We offer the following articles on this topic:
- Lloyd, E. P., Paganini, G. A., & ten Brinke, L. (2020). Gender Stereotypes Explain Disparities in Pain Care and Inform Equitable Policies. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 7(2), 198-204. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2372732220942894>
 - Tajerian, M., & Alvarado, S. (2024). Pain Research and Treatment: Policy Implications. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 11(1), 110-117. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23727322231197368>
3. The current plan touches upon mental health disparities. FABBS urges NIH to give more attention to this area. In particular, the youth mental health crisis within racial and ethnic minority populations and sexual and gender minority (SGM) populations. We also recommend that NIH address not just mental illness, but also normative mental health, prevention, resilience, and treatment. We offer the following articles on this topic:
- Matsick, J. L., Wardecker, B. M., & Oswald, F. (2020). Treat Sexual Stigma to Heal Health Disparities: Improving Sexual Minorities' Health Outcomes. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 7(2), 205-213. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2372732220942250>
 - Elisha, I. M., & Collins, R.-N. (2022). Resilience: Within-Group Variations in the Impact of Racial Discrimination on Black Youth's Mental Health. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 9(1), 11-17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23727322211068015>
 - Clendinen, C. A., & Kertes, D. A. (2022). Discrimination and Health: Fostering Better Health for Black American Youth. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 9(1), 3-10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23727322211073796>

III. Comments on the Next Generation of Health Disparities Research:

FABBS encourages NIH to continue its commitment to “health for all” while following the science to determine which populations may need more specific attention. For example, there may be other health disparities populations that merit focused attention, aside from the four identified by NIH (i.e., racial and ethnic minority populations, less privileged SES populations, underserved rural populations, and SGM populations).