



March 26, 2020

To the NJ Governor Murphy & Legislators,

My name is Luciene (Lucy) Sant'Anna Takagi, PsyD, LLC and I am writing to you as the President of the New Jersey Psychological Association (NJPA), with the approval of the NJPA Executive Board. NJPA applauds you for your leadership and actions during this very difficult, unprecedented time, in the attempt to contain the Coronavirus pandemic in NJ. In particular, your executive orders to the Department of Health Services, Department of Banking and Insurance, Department of Treasury, and the Department of Consumer Affairs, all helped secure the continued provision of psychological services to most NJ citizens during this difficult time, while urging citizens to shelter in place. For that, we are very grateful.

NJPA annually celebrates April as Minority Health Month; May as Mental Health Month; June as Pride Month; and July as Minority Mental Health Month. This year's theme of our Mental Health Awareness Campaign is "Compassionate Communities." We believe compassion and solidarity are worthwhile goals for all citizens during the current health crisis.

It is with the goal of compassion in mind, that we, as psychologists, recognize how the mental and physical health of citizens from marginalized groups can be impacted by measures that may not take their specific needs into account. For instance, NJPA applauds you for ensuring that children will continue to have school meals while quarantined, as for some children, that may be the only meal they will have. At a time when citizens are urged to remain home and work remotely, NJPA recognizes that not everyone, nor every family, has the privilege of electronic or internet access. Furthermore, at a time when Universities are also operating remotely, some students who are homeless or have nowhere to go (e.g. International students), must remain on campus and may have, not only limited resources, but an imminent difficulty continuing to pay for their tuition when they are off work (Hartocollis, 2020). Likewise, unemployed graduates may be unable to pay their student loans.

Immigrants of Asian descent are already being discriminated against nationally and in NJ. Asian-Americans are facing the coronavirus, xenophobia, and economic devastation (Shyong, 2020). Recent news indicated that



White Supremacists are encouraging their members to spread the coronavirus to the police and to Jews, as an attempt to accelerate ethnic cleansing and giving rise to a pure race (NJ.com Staff, 2020; Margolin, 2020).

Undocumented immigrants who work without benefits, may likely have no food on the table when unemployed or underemployed. Further, children may be vulnerable to homelessness, abuse (Thomas, 2020), and/ or exposure to domestic violence (Godin, 2020; Datagir, 2020), as a result of the increased stressors and of the poor coping resources available to caretakers. Your administration's attention to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) demonstrates your awareness of the special vulnerabilities of all children, especially those living in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty.

These are examples of traumatic situations impacting certain groups, but not all groups. However, the psychological impact of these stressors on marginalized and powerless groups, will likely not be known or addressed for years ahead. We suggest the following:

1. A continued governmental mindset that acknowledges and addresses the differential impact of legislative and governmental measures on groups with different levels of power and resources (e.g. race).
2. A commitment to measure all of the above impact with a comparison among groups with different levels of access to resources, during the coronavirus health crisis, in order to both assess the effectiveness of the policies and laws, as well as to develop equitable action plans to mitigate possible negative impact.
3. The implementation of a Health Justice Approach (Benfer, 2015; Benfer & Wiley, 2020) to every new policy, where interventions are accompanied by immediate legal, social and financial protections to marginalized groups, likely to endure more hardship in complying with the interventions.
4. Mental health treatment accessibility, as members of marginalized communities may be isolated and limited in accessing mental health, especially with culturally informed providers.
5. In addition, currently for clients with in-network coverage, their access to telehealth is limited to only in-network providers. Those in-network providers may not be utilizing telehealth or be available to citizens in need. NJPA continues to urge you to address these limitations under the current crisis.



The NJPA community understands the impact of traumatic events on the human psyche. It also recognizes trauma caused by racism, inequities, discrimination, microaggressions, financial disadvantages, as psychologically harmful to families and communities.

With the goal of ensuring and eliciting community compassion, NJPA respectfully asks the Governor and Legislators, to measure the consequential impact of the recent policies on communities of color. Further, NJPA stands at your disposal, as a source for any psychological information or expertise you may need.

"The mission of the New Jersey Psychological Association is the advancement of psychology as a science, as a profession, and as a means of promoting health and human welfare in an atmosphere that supports the diversity of its members and the society at large." It is with the goal of promoting health and human welfare while supporting the diversity of NJPA's members and of society at large, that we would like to support you in addressing the above across the state of NJ.

With much gratitude for your attention and consideration,

Lucy Sant'Anna Takagi, Psy.D.
NJPA President



References:

- Benfer, E. A. (2015). Health justice: A framework (and call to action) for the elimination of health inequity and social injustice. *American University Law Review*, 62 (2), 275-351.
- Benfer, E. A. & Wiley, L. F. (2020, March 19). Health justice strategies to combat COVID-19: Protecting vulnerable communities during a pandemic. *Health Affairs Blog*. Retrieved from <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hblog20200319.757883/full/>
- Datagir, A. E. (2020, March 18). Domestic violence in the age of coronavirus: What happens when you're stuck at home, but home isn't safe? *USA Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2020/03/18/coronavirus-domestic-violence-shelters-prepare-hotlines-open/5067349002/>
- Hartocollis, A. (2020, March 11). 'An eviction notice': Chaos after colleges tell students to stay away. *NY Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/11/us/colleges-cancel-classes-coronavirus.html>
- Godin, M. (2020, March 18). As cities around the world go on lockdown, victims of domestic violence look for a way out. *Time*, Retrieved from <https://time.com/5803887/coronavirus-domestic-violence-victims/>
- Margolin, J. (2020, March 23). White supremacists encouraging their members to spread coronavirus to cops, Jews, FBI says. *ABC News*. Retrieved from <https://abcnews.go.com/US/white-supremacists-encouraging-members-spread-coronavirus-cops-jews/story?id=69737522>
- NJ.com Staff (2020). White supremacists may try to spread coronavirus to police and Jews, report says. Retrieved from <https://www.nj.com/crime/2020/03/white-supremacists-may-try-to-spread-coronavirus-to-police-and-jews-report-says.html>
- Thomas, J. R. (2020, March 23). Connecticut's most vulnerable children even more at risk during coronavirus crisis. *The CT Mirror*. Retrieved from <https://ctmirror.org/2020/03/23/connecticuts-most-vulnerable-children-even-more-at-risk-during-coronavirus-crisis/>
- Shyong, F. (2020). 'It's just too much': Asian Americans confront xenophobia, economic devastation and the coronavirus. *LA Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-03-23/coronavirus-devastation-immigrants>