

ACTION ITEMS FOR BROADER SYSTEMS TO IMPROVE SUD TREATMENT FOR BLACK PATIENTS

In 2022, the Grayken Center for addiction launched 4 day-long convenings with addiction treatment experts including people with lived experience of SUD from across the country to review information gathered from prior focus groups and literature reviews and to draw conclusions about the findings from this work. The intent was to gather input on how to interpret these findings, and to translate them into recommendations. Below is a table describing recommendations broader systems that intersect with addiction can make to improve the experiences of Black people struggling with substance use disorders. For more details, see Final Report.

CHANGES IN THE BROADER SYSTEMS THAT INTERSECT WITH ADDICTION AND ADDICTION TREATMENT	Hospitals	Black patients who are in crisis and in an emergency department or inpatient setting due to their substance use often do not receive SUD treatment. Create support, such as recovery coaching, to increase rates of treatment engagement.
	State-Federal Oversight + Funding of Addiction Treatment Program	Implement system-level policies to increase racial justice for Black patients in addiction treatment services. State-level accreditation of addiction treatment programs should include a requirement and metrics for racial justice within the program
	Public Education	Some substance use is motivated by feelings of hopelessness among young people experiencing poverty, low educational quality, and racism. It is important to help students and other young people make plans for how to complete degree programs and help them to conceptualize a professional track after graduation
	Child Welfare	The child welfare system (also referred to as the family policing system) is deeply feared and perceived as biased against Black families. Recognize that fear of separation from children is a major driver for Black parents not seeking treatment for SUD. Inequitable separation practices are central to many problems in Black communities, destroying families and traumatizing children and parents. The child welfare system needs to be reformed to focus on how to keep families intact, or to reunify, rather than focusing on separation.
	Carceral System	The judicial and carceral systems are deeply rooted in systemic racism; remedies should include drastic decrease in the use of these systems to address substance-related problems.
	Policing	Many police departments across the country are demonstrably racist, resulting in violence and death for many Black people. Police response should not be used to address substance use.
	Employment	Provide recovery pathways that lead to employment. Historic and systemic racism have limited access to employment opportunities for Black people. If activities entwined with the drug culture are viewed as the only way for someone to earn a living, this is likely to prevent recovery.
	Mental Health Systems	Expand the definition of traumatic mental health disorders to include racial trauma: traumatic experiences that cause chronic distress are common and damaging among Black people with SUD, in part due to racial trauma. Because the healthcare system (as codified in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, DSM 5) does not recognize this as a formal diagnosis, it is not possible to diagnose and bill for sub-threshold mental trauma. Partly because of this, our healthcare system largely fails to address it.
	Community Organizations	Partner with non-clinical community organizations, including faith-based organizations, to provide education about SUDs and mental health problems, and inform people about the availability of treatment
	Military/VA	Because Black people serve in the military in disproportionate numbers, they will benefit the most from changes aimed at prevention of the development of SUDs and improved SUD treatment for active-duty military and veterans.