

Approved 2009; Reaffirmed 2014

Xenophobia, Immigration, and Mental Health

The American Psychiatric Association (APA) takes an official stand against the destructive consequences of ethnic prejudice and xenophobia, both for populations and for individuals. It expresses deep concern over the adverse public health and mental health consequences of these unchecked prejudices. Because of these significant adverse consequences, the APA calls for any national debates (e.g., on policies such as immigration and naturalization, foreign relations, and response to terrorism) involving people of different national ethnic, or racial backgrounds to be based on objective data and rational national interest, and not on prejudices or ideology.

The APA calls on the mass media to show responsibility and sensitivity to the rights of immigrants, refugees, and all foreign-born people, and to refrain from inflaming xenophobia in their programming. The APA advocates for the rights of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers to be respected, including rights to safe haven, security, and nurturance of one's own

ethnic and cultural beliefs/values, and identity as essential for psychological health. It further calls for national education on cultural competence and diversity, starting in public schools and mental health settings and extending to the mass media. Such education should include discussion about xenophobia and negative prejudice and their destructive consequences, as well as the acceptance and valuation of diversity.

This APA position statement was drafted by the APA Committee of Hispanic Psychiatrists (Andres J. Pumariega, M.D. [chair]; Dan Castellanos, M.D.; Jose De La Gandara, M.D.; Esperanza Diaz, M.D.; Tatiana Falcone, M.D.; Sarah Huertas-Goldman, M.D.; Alex Kopelowicz, M.D.; Luis Fernando Ramirez, M.D.; Carlos Rodriguez, M.D.; Leonardo Rodriguez, M.D.; Amado Suarez, M.D.; Natalie Weder, M.D.). It was approved by the Assembly in May 2009 and by the Board of Trustees in September 2009.