

*Message from Richard Davidson, PhD
Founder and Director Center for Healthy Minds
AIMI Advisory Board Member
June 3, 2020*

Barry,

I wish to ask for a few moments of your time to read this reflection about the current state of the United States in light of the tragedies of racist behavior and police violence against Black people that has consistently torn at the moral fabric of our society.

These are difficult and challenging times and no string of words, however meaningful or profound, can heal the ills that are eroding the very foundations of our nation. Rather than inducing a feeling of helplessness, the multiple crises we face today only further activates and energizes my passion for the work in which we are collectively committed and the vision that is shared by both the Center for Healthy Minds (CHM) and our affiliated non-profit Healthy Minds Innovations (HMI) — a kinder, wiser, and more compassionate world. This vision is more relevant and important than at any other time in my life.

Many of us, including myself, have viewed the truly horrifying murder of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man, by white members of the Minneapolis police force. This is an all too familiar scene in America. The anguish and fury this latest killing – and every killing like it – generates is understandable. And these recent instances of police violence against the Black community are but one small blip in a pervasive pattern of individual and institutional racism that is infesting people and organizations throughout our nation. The torment and pain and rage among people of color in response to this cumulative litany of racist acts, particularly during already elevated levels of anxiety and stress of the pandemic, is palpable and justifiable.

The white members of our organization, starting with me, must therefore make an unswerving commitment to practice anti-racism. CHM and HMI have a moral responsibility to redouble our personal and organizational efforts to combat racism in every way we can, at every turn and opportunity that is presented.

Racism is rampant in our society, including well-intentioned white liberals. We know from our science that simply declaring that one is not racist is a far cry from actually experiencing all human beings, whatever their skin color might be, as equals. And it is even a further cry from acting in ways to combat the insidious racism that infests every nook and cranny of our work – from the scientific measures and populations we study to the people we hire

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard". The letters are cursive and fluid, with a large initial 'R'.

Richard J. Davidson

Founder & Director, the Center for Healthy Minds, UW–Madison
Founder, Healthy Minds Innovations