

Behavioral Medicine Research Council (BMRC) Statement Papers: A New Approach to Consensus Building in Behavioral Medicine Science

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In his departing remarks, outgoing NIH Director Dr. Francis Collins lamented that he should have engaged more with behavioral science to develop COVID-19 mitigation strategies [1]. Behavioral medicine can contribute unique value to public health efforts to achieve optimal health for all. Yet, we continue to see gaps in the dissemination of behavioral medicine research and gaps in the effective translation of science into public health practice and policy.

The Behavioral Medicine Research Council (BMRC) addresses these gaps by building a strong collaborative foundation for behavioral medicine. The BMRC is an autonomous, joint committee made up of representatives from the four leading U.S.-based behavioral medicine organizations: the Academy of Behavioral Medicine Research (ABMR); the American Psychosomatic Society (APS); the Society of Behavioral Medicine (SBM); and the Society for Health Psychology (SfHP) [2]. The goal of the BMRC is to identify strategic behavioral medicine research goals and promote systematic, interdisciplinary approaches to achieve them. The efforts of the BMRC include but are not limited to identifying specific research targets, prescribing best practices, cultivating a field-level culture, and building coalitions and joint advocacy to improve the influence of behavioral science in the broader research community, and the public, and policymakers. The BMRC comprises two distinguished senior scientists to represent each of the member societies for 3-year terms. In addition, the editors-in-chief of the three major journals—*Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, *Health Psychology*, and *Psychosomatic Medicine*—also engage in coordinating and facilitating dissemination. This coalition represents a new effort to harness the field's collective strength and lead toward a more remarkable impact on population health assertively.

The BMRC has initiated a new initiative, the BMRC Scientific Statement papers. The statement papers will move the field forward by guiding efforts to improve the quality of behavioral medicine research and practice and facilitate the dissemination and translation of behavioral medicine research.

From climate change to methodological recommendations to population frameworks to advance equity, BMRC statements will aim to codify positions on key issues, identify shared priorities, and provide guidance to facilitate

transformative progress. Similar to other guiding entities such as the U.S. Preventive Task Force, the BMRC scientific statements are drafted by experts in collaboration with the BMRC and, in many cases, with direct stakeholder input. In addition, all statement manuscripts undergo peer review prior to simultaneous publication in the three journals.

Rationale for a Unifying Approach

Since the publication of the biopsychosocial model 45 years ago [3], the field of behavioral medicine has made significant progress. This includes establishing guiding models, funding mechanisms, peer evaluation to critique and optimize the science, journals to disseminate findings, and the proliferation of programs to train the next generation of scientists and practitioners. However, our public health impact potential has yet to be realized, in part due to the fragmented nature of our efforts. The science in our field is primarily conducted by individuals, independent labs, and small collective networks that often work independently and, in some cases, competitively with others studying the same phenomenon. Sampling, methods, measures, and reporting all vary within this approach, further contributing to the lack of consensus and hampering our collective advancement. Indeed, our field largely sits outside the broader public health ecosystem in part due to our fragmented nature. As evidence, consider the role (or lack thereof) behavioral medicine played in national and international efforts to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic. Could we have offered clear contributions if invited to the conversation, or would it have been a cacophony of loosely connected opinions?

A critical next step in the evolution of behavioral medicine science is to find ways to integrate efforts within our field. The publication of best practice guidelines is one method to facilitate a more integrated science leading to aggregation and advancement. For example, best practice guidelines, such as this BMRC statement on open science, can shape a scientific culture of common structures for terminology, measures, reporting, and dissemination. Increased methodological consistency will allow us to bring order to our often creative but discordant work. In this context, open science guidelines will help clarify the preferred method of dissemination and allow readers to assess the scientific rigor of individual studies and more expansive phenomena of interest more clearly and with greater access.

BMRC Statement on Open Science

Science is the process of systematically gathering and disseminating knowledge. It reflects data, and new data can change what it reflects. It evolves and can optimize its reflection. Like a trail of breadcrumbs, it can describe where we have been, and it can be used to point to where we are going. To trust in science is to have faith in the process. That trust reflects the quality of the data as well as transparency in describing how the data were gathered and communicated. The *Open Science* movement aims to optimize trust in the scientific process through various reporting methods and tools. The movement also raises several questions about the degree of transparency in behavioral medicine, which methods and mechanisms are most appropriate, and the risk of unintended consequences from a lack of transparency.

At the request of the BMRC, a panel of experts in open science practices came together to articulate the key issues and develop recommendations for best practices to guide the field of behavioral medicine. The resulting BMRC statement represents both a consensus position on whether and how to navigate the issues of open science and a broader approach to consolidate efforts within the field of behavioral medicine. The statement's goal is to provide investigators with a clear set of guidelines that should further enhance trust in behavioral medicine science.

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The mission of the Behavioral Medical Research Council is to identify strategic, high-priority research goals and

encourage multidisciplinary and multicenter research networks to pursue them. The BMRC consists of representatives of the following organizations: Academy of Behavioral Medicine Research; American Psychosomatic Society; Society for Health Psychology; and the Society of Behavioral Medicine. More information about the BMRC can be found at <https://www.behavioralmedicineresearch-council.org/>.

The content of this paper is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views or policies of the US National Cancer Institute, National Institutes of Health, or Department of Health and Human Services.

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