COVID-19 Volume 26 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on the inadequacies of our public institutions and has brought to the fore complex issues surrounding racism, misinformation, social justice and inequity which are often overlooked. The current pandemic crisis requires a large-scale uniform response which has been dictated by the recommendations of epidemiologists; these recommendations include, social distancing, masking and hand washing. However, behavioral and social factors have impacted the successful enactment of these recommendations since conditions such as political affiliation, misinformation promoted by the media, inadequate or miscommunicated information surrounding medical interventions, and racism and inequity, have all contributed to creating an ineffective response to the containment of the spread of the pandemic. The Editorial Board of the Harvard Public Health Review has recognized that these issues need to surface and be addressed if we are to effectively respond to the challenges COVID-19 has brought upon us. These issues are not new, as they have existed and have been embedded in our systems. For instance, due to economic inequities, minority populations within underprivileged communities do not usually have access to healthcare services and those that do, may not be taken seriously. This has manifested in scenarios where these populations have withdrawn into isolation preferring to treat their own, making a coherent and collective response to COVID-19 difficult. The HPHR Editorial Board is committed to promoting discourse around such issues and has published a few personal essays centering around using communication as a tool for addressing racial disparity and the pros and cons of hospital births for Black women. In this volume, several studies have also been published concerning political affiliation and human mobility while under stay-at-home orders, as well as the health implications of political misinformation. We believe that it is our responsibility to spotlight these issues and bring forth awareness in an effort to open up a wider range of public discourse in the hopes of eventually resolving these issues.