

Member Letter – Facing Our History – Building an Equitable Future Initiative
January 2023

January 24, 2023

Dear All ASHG Members,

As 2023 ASHG President, I'm writing directly to you, our members, to share an important new [report](#) and Board of Directors [statement](#) released today as part of ASHG's commitment to a more diverse, equitable and inclusive human genetics community and research agenda. As you will read, the report documents past injustices and harms associated with ASHG and human genetics as well as pivots toward justice. Reflecting on the full report, the Board of Directors statement apologizes for the involvement of early Society leaders in eugenics and its silence at times when genetics was used to feed racism; decries continued use of genetics to feed discrimination; and commits to sustaining and growing its efforts to advance equity.

The report and statement emerge from the ASHG *Facing Our History – Building an Equitable Future Initiative* launched in 2021. At that time, then-president Gail Jarvik stated, "we disavow eugenics and its underlying racist foundation, yet historic field beliefs, actions and statements contributed to legacy views that have now been discredited and that are inconsistent with ASHG's values."

The report and its findings are painful and document a history that must be told and taught so we can prevent its resurgence. To support that commitment, the Society is also establishing initial and long-term steps we will be taking to strengthen diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives and better integrate equity principles into the study of human genetics. Collectively, we have made important strides in recent decades, but we have much work still to do. As immediate actions laid out in the statement, ASHG commits to:

- Publish the full report and statement online and in its flagship journal, enabling them to become part of public and field dialogue and progress
- Increase integration of equity into its scientific and training initiatives, including content in its annual meeting, journals, and training programs
- Advocate for research diversity, equity and inclusion through its policy and communications agendas
- Continue to build the diversity and inclusivity of its leadership
- Suspend the use of individuals' names for its professional awards, pending review of any affiliation with eugenics or other harms
- Further prioritize diversity, equity and inclusion objectives within its upcoming 2024-2028 strategic plan.

The Board believes this report is a vital part of its inclusive vision to realize the benefits of genetics and genomics research for all people. By acknowledging our history and apologizing for wrongs, we are seeking to genuinely form a stronger foundation for trust and inclusion. Human genetics has transformative potential to serve human health and society, but we can succeed only if we have full representation and participation of all backgrounds and perspectives.

As a life-long member of the Society who is honored to be your president this year, I am confident that this moment will be remembered as an important step forward in realizing our inclusive vision. On behalf of the entire ASHG Board of Directors, I urge each of you to read the [report](#) and [statement](#) in full,

allowing us all to learn from them, act on them, and work together to build a brighter future. We also welcome your input and perspectives on the report's findings and encourage you to submit them [here](#) .

Sincerely,
Brendan Lee, MD, PhD
President