



FACT SHEET

Health Disparities by Race and Ethnicity

By Sofia Carratala and Connor Maxwell May 7, 2020

The United States is home to stark and persistent racial disparities in health coverage, chronic health conditions, mental health, and mortality. These disparities are not a result of individual or group behavior but decades of systematic inequality in American economic, housing, and health care systems. This fact sheet sheds light on some of the most persistent inequities facing African Americans or Black Americans, Hispanic Americans or Latinx Americans, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander Americans, and American Indians or Alaska Natives. Alleviating health disparities will require a deliberate and sustained effort to address social determinants of health, such as poverty, segregation, environmental degradation, and racial discrimination.

African Americans or Black Americans

An African American or Black person is any individual with total or partial ancestry from any of the Black racial groups of Africa.

Health coverage

- In 2017, 10.6 percent of African Americans were uninsured compared with 5.9 percent of non-Hispanic whites.¹
- 89.4 percent of African Americans had health care coverage in 2017 compared with 93.7 percent of white Americans.²
 - 44.1 percent of African Americans had government health insurance coverage in 2017.³
- 12.1 percent of African Americans under the age of 65 reported having no health insurance coverage.⁴

Chronic health conditions

- 13.8 percent of African Americans reported having fair or poor health compared with 8.3 percent of non-Hispanic whites.⁵
- Eighty percent of African American women are overweight or obese compared to 64.8 percent of non-Hispanic white women.⁶

- In 2017, 12.6 percent of American African children had current asthma compared with 7.7 percent of non-Hispanic white children. Forty-two percent of African American adults over age 20 suffer from hypertension compared with 28.7 percent of non-Hispanic white adults.⁷

Mental health

- In 2018, 8.7 percent of African American adults received mental health services compared with 18.6 percent of non-Hispanic white adults.⁸
- 6.2 percent of African American adults received prescription medication for mental health services compared with 15.3 percent of non-Hispanic white adults.⁹
- In 2018, 3.8 percent of African American adults reported serious psychological distress.¹⁰

Leading causes of death

- The leading causes of death among African Americans are heart disease, cancer, and accidents.¹¹
- African Americans have the highest mortality rate for all cancers combined compared with any other racial and ethnic group.¹²
- There are 11 infant deaths per 1,000 live births among Black Americans. This is almost twice the national average of 5.8 infant deaths per 1,000 live births.¹³
- 11.4 per 100,000 African American men and 2.8 per 100,000 of African American women die by suicide.¹⁴

Hispanic Americans or Latinx Americans

The federal government defines Hispanic or Latino “as a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race.”¹⁵

Health coverage

- In 2017, 16.1 percent of Hispanics were uninsured compared with 5.9 percent of non-Hispanic whites.¹⁶
- 83.9 percent of Hispanics had health care coverage in 2017 compared with 93.7 percent white non-Hispanic Americans.¹⁷
 - 39.5 percent of Hispanics had government health insurance coverage in 2017.¹⁸
- 20.1 percent of Hispanics under the age of 65 reported having no health insurance coverage.¹⁹
- In 2017, 7.7 percent of Hispanic children were uninsured compared with 4.1 percent of non-Hispanic white, 4.0 percent of non-Hispanic Black, and 3.8 percent of non-Hispanic Asian children.²⁰

Chronic health conditions

- Ten percent of Hispanics reported having fair or poor health compared with 8.3 percent of non-Hispanic whites.²¹
- 21.5 percent of Hispanic adults over age 20 have been diagnosed with diabetes compared with 13 percent of white adults over age 20.²²
- Approximately 25 percent of Hispanics have high blood pressure.²³
- Hispanic women are 40 percent more likely to have cervical cancer and 20 percent more likely to die from cervical cancer than non-Hispanic white women.²⁴

Mental health

- In 2018, 8.8 percent of Hispanic adults received mental health services compared with 18.6 percent of non-Hispanic white adults.²⁵
- 6.8 percent of Hispanic adults received prescription medication for mental health services compared with 15.4 percent of non-Hispanic white adults.²⁶
- In 2018, 4.6 percent of Hispanic adults reported serious psychological distress.²⁷
- In 2017, the number of suicide attempts by adolescent Hispanic females was 40 percent higher than that of adolescent non-Hispanic white females.²⁸

Leading causes of death

- The leading causes of death among Hispanics are cancer, heart disease, and accidents.²⁹
- The life expectancy for Hispanics, 81.9 years, is longer than that of non-Hispanic whites.³⁰
- In 2017, the infant mortality rate for Puerto Ricans was 40 percent higher than for non-Hispanic whites.³¹
- There are 5.1 infant deaths per 1,000 live births among Hispanic and Latinx Americans.³²

Asian Americans

An Asian American person is an American with origins in any of the original peoples of East Asia, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent, including but not limited to China, Korea, India, and Pakistan.

Health coverage

- In 2017, 7.3 percent of Asian Americans were uninsured compared with 5.9 percent of non-Hispanic whites.³³
- 92.7 percent of Asian Americans had health care coverage in 2017.³⁴
 - 29.6 percent of Asian Americans had government health insurance coverage in 2017.³⁵

Chronic health conditions

- In 2017, tuberculosis was 35 times more common in Asian Americans than among non-Hispanic whites.³⁶
- Although Asian Americans have overall lower cancer rates than non-Hispanic whites, they have nearly twice the incidence of liver and inflammatory bowel disease cancer.³⁷
- Asian Americans are twice as likely to develop chronic hepatitis B than non-Hispanic whites and are eight times more likely to die from hepatitis B than non-Hispanic whites.³⁸
- Asian Americans are 40 percent more likely to be diagnosed with diabetes than non-Hispanic white Americans. They are also 80 percent more likely to be diagnosed with end-stage renal disease.³⁹

Mental health

- In 2018, 2.1 percent of Asian American adults reported serious psychological distress.⁴⁰
- In 2018, 6.3 percent of Asian American adults received mental health services compared with 18.6 percent of non-Hispanic white adults.⁴¹
- 3.6 percent of Asian American adults received prescription medications for mental health services compared with 15.4 percent of non-Hispanic white adults.⁴²

Leading causes of death

- The leading causes of death for Asian Americans include cancer, stroke, heart disease, accidents, and diabetes.⁴³
- There are 3.8 infant deaths per 1,000 live births in this population.⁴⁴
- In 2017, suicide was the leading cause of death for Asian Americans ages 15 to 24.⁴⁵

Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander Americans

A Native Hawaiian person is any individual with total or partial ancestry from the indigenous or aboriginal people of the Hawaiian Islands. A Pacific Islander is an individual with origins in any of the original peoples of Polynesia, Melanesia, or Micronesia, including but not limited to Guam, Samoa, Fiji, Palau, Tokelau, and the Marshall Islands.

Health coverage

- In 2017, 8.3 percent of Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders were uninsured compared with 5.9 percent of non-Hispanic whites.⁴⁶
- 66.9 percent of Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders had private health insurance in 2017 compared with 75.4 percent of white Americans.⁴⁷
- 33.5 percent of Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders had government health insurance in 2017.⁴⁸

Chronic health conditions

- Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders have higher rates of smoking, alcohol consumption, and obesity in comparison to other populations.⁴⁹

- The incidence rate of tuberculosis for Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders is higher than in any other population.⁵⁰
- In 2014, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders were 10 percent more likely to have diagnosed coronary heart disease than non-Hispanic whites.⁵¹
- In 2016, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders were 80 percent more likely to be obese compared with non-Hispanic whites.⁵²

Mental health

- In 2018, 6.9 percent of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander adults reported a major depressive episode in the past year.⁵³
- In 2018, 21.1 percent of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander adults reported any form of mental illness.⁵⁴
- 10.9 percent of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander adults received mental health services in 2018 compared with 18.6 percent of non-Hispanic white adults.⁵⁵
- 6.3 percent of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander adults received prescription medication for mental health services in 2018 compared with 15.4 percent of non-Hispanic white adults.⁵⁶

Leading causes of death

- From 2013 to 2015, Native Hawaiians had the highest mortality rate for all types of cancer in the state.⁵⁷
- The leading causes of death for Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders include cancer, heart disease, accidents, stroke, and diabetes.⁵⁸
- There are 7.6 infant deaths per 1,000 living births in this population.⁵⁹

American Indians and Alaska Natives

An American Indian person is any individual belonging to the indigenous tribes of the continental United States. An Alaska Native person is any individual belonging to the indigenous tribes and villages of Alaska.

Health coverage

- In 2017, 14.9 percent of American Indians and Alaska Natives were uninsured compared with 5.9 percent of non-Hispanic whites.⁶⁰

Chronic health conditions

- 17.4 percent of American Indians and Alaska Natives reported having fair or poor health compared with 8.3 percent of non-Hispanic whites.⁶¹
- American Indians and Alaska Natives have a rate of HIV infection twice as high as that of non-Hispanic whites.⁶²
- In 2017, American Indian and Alaska Native adults were almost three times more likely to have diabetes than non-Hispanic white adults. They were also 2.5 times more likely to die from diabetes.⁶³

- American Indian and Alaska Native adolescents are 30 percent more likely than non-Hispanic white adolescents to be obese.⁶⁴
- American Indian and Alaska Native youth and adults have the highest rates of cigarette smoking among all racial and ethnic groups in the United States.⁶⁵

Mental health

- In 2018, 4.5 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native adults reported serious psychological distress.⁶⁶
- In 2018, 14.1 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native adults received mental health services compared with 18.6 percent of non-Hispanic white adults.⁶⁷
- 11.6 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native adults received prescription medication for mental health services compared with 15.4 percent of non-Hispanic white adults.⁶⁸

Leading causes of death

- The leading causes of death among American Indians and Alaska Natives are heart disease, cancer, and accidents.⁶⁹
- In 2018, chronic liver disease was the fourth-leading cause of death for American Indians and Alaskan natives.⁷⁰
- Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer-related deaths among American Indians and Alaska natives.⁷¹
- There are 9.2 infant deaths for every 1,000 living births in this population.⁷²
- In 2017, suicide was the second-leading cause of death among American Indian and Alaska Natives ages 10 to 34.⁷³

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