

Mental Health Disparities: African Americans

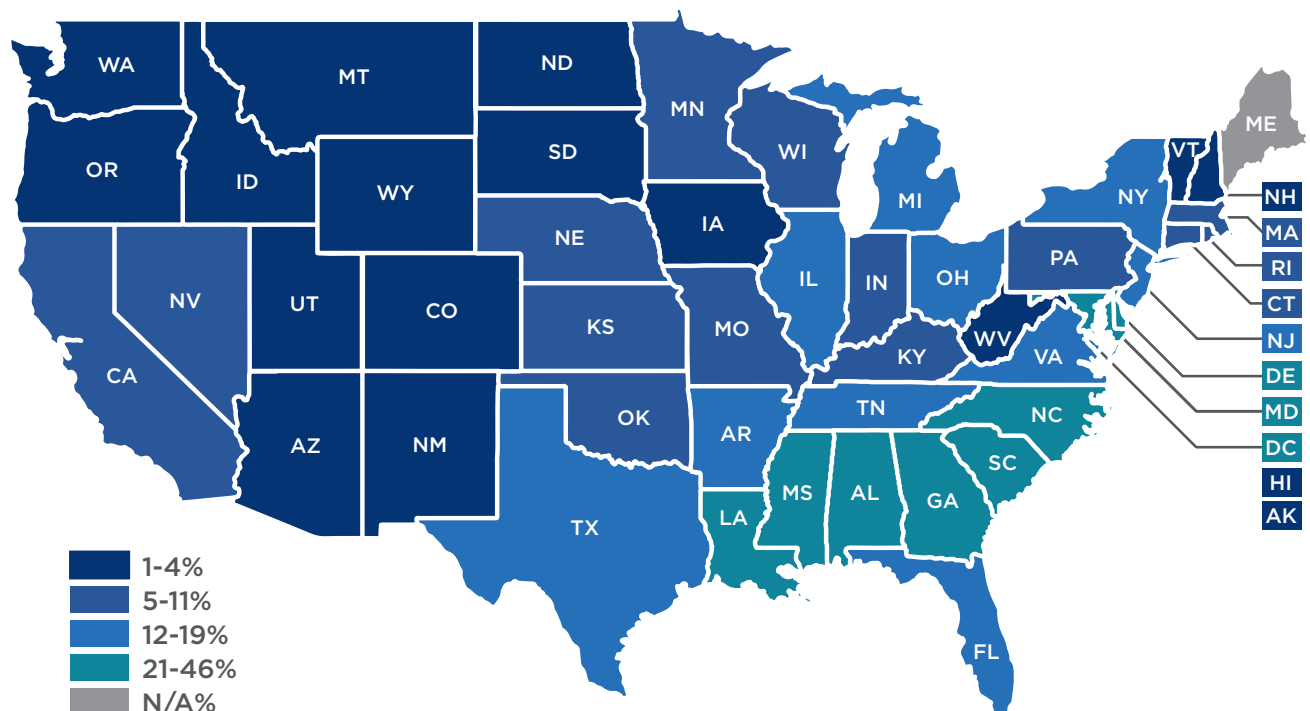
African American Population

- African Americans make up 13.3% of the US population.¹
- African American communities across the US are culturally diverse, with immigrants from African nations, the Caribbean, Central America, and other countries.
- About 27% of African Americans live below the poverty level compared to about 10.8% of non-Hispanic whites.²
- Approximately 30% of African American households are headed by a woman with no husband present, compared with about 9% of white households.³

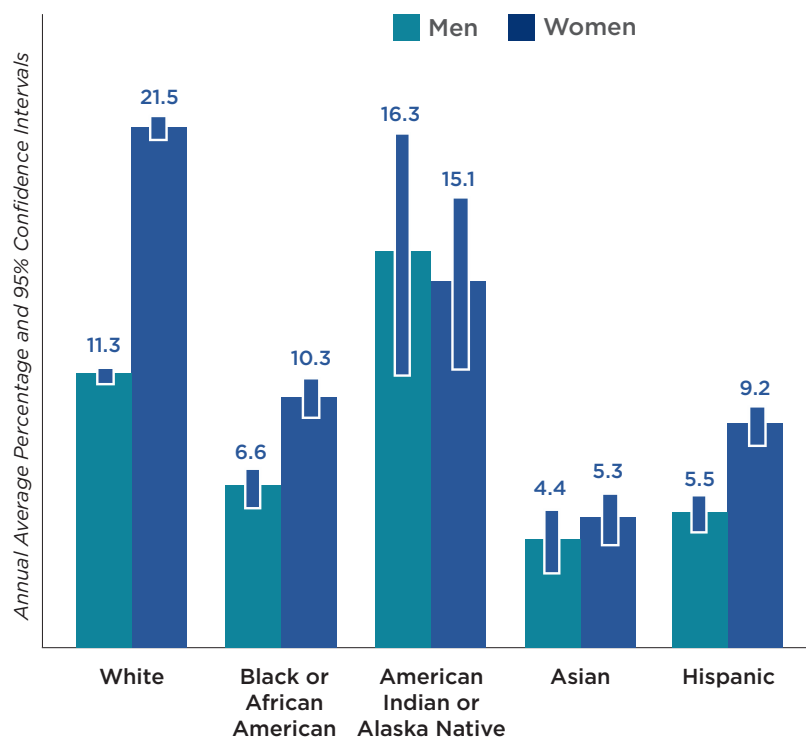
Health Challenges

- Approximately 11% of African Americans are not covered by health insurance, compared with about 7% for non-Hispanic whites.⁴
- Death rate for African Americans is higher than whites for heart diseases, stroke, cancer, asthma, influenza and pneumonia, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, and homicide.⁵
- CDC estimates that African Americans represented more than one-third (40% or 498,400 persons) of all people living with HIV and almost half (45%) of all persons with newly diagnosed infection in 2015.⁶

Population Distribution of Black Americans in the United States



Mental Health Service Use in the Past Year among Adults



Source: SAMHSA, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2008-2012

Mental Health Status, Use of Services, and Disparities

- Rates of mental illnesses in African Americans are similar with those of the general population. However, disparities exist in regard to mental health care services. African Americans often receive poorer quality of care and lack access to culturally competent care.⁷
- Only one-in-three African Americans who need mental health care receives it.⁸
- Compared with non-Hispanic whites, African Americans with any mental illness have lower rates of any mental health service use including prescriptions medications and outpatient services, but higher use of inpatient services.⁹
- The rate of illicit drug use among African Americans is slightly higher than the national average (12.4% vs 10.2%). Rate of alcohol use is slightly lower than the national average (44.2% vs 52.7%) including heavy drinking (4.5% vs 6.2%) and binge drinking (21.6% vs 23%).¹⁰
- Rate of opioid overdose among African Americans (6.6%) is less than half of that for non-Hispanic whites (13.9%).¹¹
- Compared with whites, African Americans are:
 - Less likely to receive guideline-consistent care
 - Less frequently included in research
 - More likely to use emergency rooms or primary care (rather than mental health specialists)¹²

- Compared with the general population, African Americans are less likely to be offered either evidence-based medication therapy or psychotherapy.¹³
- Compared with whites with the same symptoms, African Americans are more frequently diagnosed with schizophrenia and less frequently diagnosed with mood disorders. Differences in how African Americans express symptoms of emotional distress may contribute to misdiagnosis.¹⁴
- Physician-patient communication differs for African Americans and whites. One study found that physicians were 23% more verbally dominant, and engaged in 33% less patient-centered communication with African American patients than with white patients.¹⁵
- Black people with mental health conditions, particularly schizophrenia, bipolar disorders, and other psychoses are more likely to be incarcerated than people of other races.^{16,17}

Other common barriers include: the importance of family privacy, lack of knowledge regarding available treatments, and denial of mental health problems. Concerns about stigma, medications, not receiving appropriate information about services, and dehumanizing services have also been reported to hinder African Americans from accessing mental health services.

To learn about best practices for treating diverse populations and to get answers to your questions by leading psychiatrists, please visit APA's Cultural Competency webpage at <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/cultural-competency>.

Barriers to Care

Despite recent efforts to improve mental health services for African Americans and other minority groups, barriers remain regarding access to and quality of care. The barriers include:

- Stigma associated with mental illness
- Distrust of the health care system
- Lack of providers from diverse racial/ethnic backgrounds
- Lack of culturally competent providers
- Lack of insurance, underinsurance

Footnotes

- ¹ U.S. Census Bureau. "U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts selected: United States." 2016. www.census.gov
- ² U.S. Census Bureau. "Income and Poverty in the United States: 2015." 2016. <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2016/demo/p60-256.html>
- ³ U.S. Census Bureau. "U.S. Census Bureau. 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates." 2015. https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_15_5YR_S1701&prodType=table
- ⁴ U.S. Census Bureau. "Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2015." 2016. <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2016/demo/p60-257.pdf>
- ⁵ Office of Minority Health, HHS. African American Profile. 2009. <http://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/templates/browse.aspx?lvl=2&lvlID=51>
- ⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "HIV among African Americans." 2017. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchstp/newsroom/docs/factsheets/cdc-hiv-aa-508.pdf>
- ⁷ Primm A, et al. "African Americans," chapter in *Disparities in Psychiatric Care*. Ruiz and Primm editors. Washington, DC: Lippincott, Williams & Wilkins. 2010.
- ⁸ Dalencour M, et al. "The Role of Faith-Based Organizations in the Depression Care of African Americans and Hispanics in Los Angeles." *Psychiatric Services*. 2017. 68(4):368-374.
- ⁹ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. "Racial/ Ethnic Differences in Mental Health Service Use among Adults." 2015.
- ¹⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. "Health, United States, 2015." 2016. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hus/2015/050.pdf>
- ¹¹ Kaiser Family Foundation. "Opioid Overdose Deaths by Race/Ethnicity (2012-2015)." 2017. <http://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/opioid-overdose-deaths-by-raceethnicity/?dataView=2&activeTab=graph¤tTimeframe=0&startTimeframe=3&selectedDistributions=white-non-hispanic--black-non-hispanic--hispanic&selectedRows=%7B%22wrapups%22:%7B%22united-states%22:%7B%7D%7D%7D&sortModel=%7B%22colld%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>
- ¹² US Surgeon General, HHS. *Mental Health: Culture, Races, and Ethnicity—A Supplement to Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General*. 2001. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK44243/>
- ¹³ Wang PS, Berglund P, Kessler RC. "Recent care of common mental disorders in the United States: Prevalence and conformance with evidence-based recommendations." *J Gen Intern Med*. 2000. 15(5), 284-292.
- ¹⁴ Bell C, et al. "Misdiagnosis of African-Americans with Psychiatric Issues-Part II." *J Natl Med Assoc*. 2015. 107(3):35-41. [http://www.journalnma.org/article/S0027-9684\(15\)30049-3/pdf](http://www.journalnma.org/article/S0027-9684(15)30049-3/pdf)
- ¹⁵ Johnson R, et al. "Patient race/ethnicity and quality of patient-physician communication during medical visits." *Am J Public Health*. 2004. 94(12), 2084-90.
- ¹⁶ U.S. Department of Justice. "Prisoners in 2015." *NCJ 250229 (Bureau of Justice Statistics Bulletin)*. 2016. <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/p15.pdf>
- ¹⁷ Hawthorne W, et al. "Incarceration among adults who are in the public mental health system: rates, risk factors, and short-term outcomes." *Psychiatr Serv*. 2012 Jan;63(1):26-32.

This resource was prepared by the Division of Diversity and Health Equity. It was updated by Phillip Murray, M.D., and reviewed by Danielle Hairston, M.D., and the Council on Minority Mental Health and Health Disparities.