

HEALTH DISPARITIES

What are health disparities?

Health disparities refer to differences in health between populations that are closely linked with social, economic, and/or environmental disadvantages. Health disparities cause a higher burden of disease, disability, or mortality in one population relative to another based on their racial or ethnic group, religion, gender, age, socioeconomic status, mental health, disability status, sexual orientation or gender identity, or geographic location. Low-income individuals and ethnic and racial minorities also face increased barriers to accessing care, receive poorer quality care, and ultimately experience worse health outcomes.

Why do they matter?

Racial and ethnic minorities experience higher rates of disease and disability compared to the rest of the U.S. population. Twice as many African-Americans, American Indian, and Alaskan Native babies die before one year of age compared to Caucasian Americans.¹ By 2050, more than half of the population will be minorities. As populations become diverse, it will become increasingly important to address health disparities.

\$309 billion

is lost per year as a result of direct and indirect costs of health disparities.²



Opportunities to achieve health equity

Health disparities must be addressed and eliminated to improve the health and well-being of all Americans. Although achieving reductions in health disparities takes time, improvements can be made through policies and programs that address the factors that impact health.

Affordable Care Act (ACA)

- The ACA aims to increase efforts at the federal level on minority health issues. Under the ACA, the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD) became a full institute, with provisions aimed at improving data collection to track and reduce health disparities.
- The Office of Minority Health provides funding to state offices of minority health and health equity, community and faith-based organizations, tribes and tribal organizations, and other organizations dedicated to eliminating health disparities.
- The ACA established several divisions to focus on minority health within agencies of the Department of Health and Human Services, such as the CDC and FDA.
- The ACA expanded research on health disparities and reauthorized grant programs designed to encourage racial and ethnic diversity in the health care workforce and supports the training of professionals in cultural competency.
- The ACA also increased health insurance coverage and funding for prevention and health education.

OTHER FACTORS THAT AFFECT HEALTH INCLUDE:

- ✓ Availability & access to nutritious food
- ✓ Recreational activities
- ✓ Safe housing
- ✓ High quality education
- ✓ Access to job opportunities
- ✓ Clean water and non-polluted air
- ✓ Affordable, reliable public transportation
- ✓ Social support
- ✓ Culturally sensitive health care providers
- ✓ Exposure to crime and violence

Recommendations:³

1. Ensure a strategic focus on communities at greatest risk.
2. Reduce disparities in access to quality health care.
3. Increase the capacity of the prevention workforce to identify and address disparities.
4. Support research to identify effective strategies to eliminate health disparities.
5. Standardize and collect data to better identify and address disparities.

HEALTHY PEOPLE 2020

Health People 2020's goal is to "achieve health equity, eliminate disparities, and improve the health of all groups".

¹ American Public Health Association. "Health Disparities: The Basics." Retrieved from: https://www.apha.org/-/media/files/pdf/factsheets/hlthdisparty_primer_final.ashx

² Kaiser Family Foundation. "Disparities in Health and Health Care: Five Key Questions and Answers." (2012).

³ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. Surgeon General. "Elimination of Health Disparities" (2014). <https://www.healthypeople.gov/>

