

Racial Inequities in Health Care

Dating back to the beginning of this nation, health disparities have existed and have plagued Black people and other people of color as a result of systemic racism, which influences every social determinant of health.

Examples of Health Disparities

Among Black people, we see:

- Higher rates of infant and maternal mortality
- Higher rates of chronic conditions
- Lower life expectancy

Examples of Health Inequities

Low-income and minority groups ...

- Lack of transportation
- Lack of access to nutritious food
- Lack of access to safe spaces within the neighborhood for exercise

History of Discrimination

Government policies have permitted racism in our healthcare system for decades dating back to the Civil War. It wasn't until 1963 that the federal court desegregated government-funded hospitals.

Discrimination by health care providers is also a factor impacting the health of Black people. Some health care providers still hold false beliefs (dating back to slavery) that Black people have a higher tolerance for pain and other physical attributes which influence their medical judgment and clinical approach.

Policies to Decrease the Health Disparities

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) has contributed to a reduction in health disparities by:

- Providing outreach in multiple languages to remove linguistic barriers to enrolling in both public and private insurance among Hispanic and Asian people;
- Strengthening federal prohibitions against discrimination by health care providers receiving federal funds; and
- Prohibiting insurers from denying coverage based on preexisting conditions

However, there are some people who do not qualify for Medicaid or ACA subsidies and are unable to afford private insurance. Medicaid has been expanded in most states to address this "coverage gap," and studies have shown this had led to decreased health disparities. Tennessee is one of eight southern states refusing to expand Medicaid. The expansion would bring \$1.4 billion per year into the state, which would financially support hospitals, create 15,000 health care jobs, and provide health insurance to over 300,000 Tennesseans who are in the coverage gap – 26% of whom are African Americans. The additional federal funds (\$3.8 million flowing to Tennessee per day) would provide much needed investment dollars for health care and other priorities, such as education.