

ANALYSIS OF MINORITY HEALTH REVEALS PERSISTENT, WIDESPREAD DISPARITIES

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A comprehensive new Commonwealth Fund report of minority Americans' health care experiences paints a stark picture of the health status of and health care received by racial and ethnic minorities. *U.S. Minority Health: A Chartbook*, by Fund staff Karen Scott Collins, M.D., Allyson Hall, Ph.D., and Charlotte Neuhaus, finds that minority Americans lag behind on nearly every health indicator, including health care coverage, access to care, life expectancy, and disease rates.

The chartbook, which compares findings from several Fund surveys, national data sources, and presents Fund-sponsored research findings, also reveals that despite substantial overall improvements in Americans' health, racial and ethnic disparities persist across age, sex, and income categories. Some striking examples include the black infant mortality rate, which is twice that of all U.S. infants; a higher breast cancer mortality rate for black women than white women (even though black women have a lower incidence rate); and nearly twice as many Hispanic adults report they do not have a regular doctor compared to white adults.

Minority adults are also more likely to lack health insurance than are white adults, a consistent trend over the past decade. Nearly two of five (38%) Hispanic adults, one of four (24%) black adults, and one of four (24%) Asian-American adults are uninsured, compared with one of seven (14%) white adults.

Elderly minorities experience disparities in access to care and health status, in part because Medicare covers only about half the health

care expenses of older Americans. Two of five Hispanic and two of five black Americans age 65 and older rate their health status as fair or poor, compared with less than one of four (23%) white Americans 65 and over. Minority Americans 65 and older are less likely to have a regular doctor or to see a specialist.

Noticeable improvement, however, is evident on some measures. For example, the rate of black women receiving mammograms and Pap tests has increased.

Minorities are also underrepresented in medical education and in the health care delivery system. Although blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans make up 24 percent of the U.S. population, only seven percent of physicians, five percent of dentists, and six percent of medical school faculty members are from one of these minority groups.

Facts and Figures

- Nearly two of five (39%) black adults and almost half (46%) of Hispanic adults report that they do not have a regular doctor, compared with one of four (26%) of white adults.
 - Almost half (45%) of Hispanic adults, two of five (41%) Asian-American adults, and more than one of three (35%) black adults report difficulty paying for medical care, compared with one of four (26%) white adults.
 - While about two-thirds (65%) of white Medicare beneficiaries were vaccinated against the flu in the past year, about four of 10 (43%) blacks received a flu shot in the past 12 months. Half (49%) of Hispanics had a flu shot in that time.
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