

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- In North Carolina, latest reports from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) show that **Black residents account for 27 percent of confirmed coronavirus patients and 33 percent of deaths** from coronavirus, even though only just over [21 percent](#) of state residents are Black.
- Policy decisions at the state level, **such as not expanding Medicaid**, have made existing racial disparities in health care even more stark.
- Especially in the midst of a global pandemic, policymakers have an obligation to help address these racial inequities by **expanding Medicaid and protecting the Affordable Care Act**.
- **North Carolina lawmakers should join calls for transparent reporting** of coronavirus data that so far show unacceptable racial disparities.
- **Police brutality against Black Americans is a public health crisis that must be addressed and rectified.**

INTRODUCTION

Nationwide, a [disproportionate number](#) of Black Americans and other minorities are being diagnosed with coronavirus and are experiencing worse outcomes from the disease. A staggeringly high percentage of deaths from this pandemic is coming from Black communities. [Health experts agree](#) on why this disparity exists: longstanding, structural inequalities that the Black community has faced within the health care system. In North Carolina, the state's [failure](#) to expand Medicaid has only made the challenges more acute over the last decade.

Among non-elderly Americans, [Kaiser Family Foundation](#) found that 11 percent of Black Americans lack health insurance, 19 percent of Hispanics are uninsured, and as many as 22 percent of Native Americans – all higher than the national average.

While [reporting](#) shows clear racial disparities in coronavirus transmission and outcomes, some states have not disclosed the race of those who have been tested, who have been treated, or who have died from the virus. This prevents lawmakers in those communities from being able to address racial inequities that are emerging during the coronavirus pandemic.

RACIAL DISPARITIES IN NORTH CAROLINA

The COVID-19 pandemic is hitting black Americans especially hard and this trend is as evident in North Carolina as anywhere with Black residents experiencing disturbingly worse outcomes than white residents.

In North Carolina, where the latest Census records show that Black residents make up [21.4 percent](#) of the population, NCDHHS reports that, as of June 9, [27 percent](#) of the confirmed cases of coronavirus in North Carolina are from Black residents. Further, [33 percent](#) of deaths from coronavirus in North Carolina have been Black residents.

Sadly, these outcomes fit with historical [health inequities](#) that break along racial lines. Indeed, long-standing economic and environmental [inequalities](#) in Black communities have only been exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. The bleak outcomes of this pandemic are shedding light on a situation in which Black Americans across the country, including in North Carolina, are at greater risk due to higher rates of chronic illness and less access to health care.

North Carolina's Black communities often experience higher rates of certain health issues, especially some that put them at a [higher risk](#) of developing serious complications from the coronavirus.

- On average, one-in-four people living in the ten counties in North Carolina with the highest percentage of Black residents report being in [poor or fair health](#). In Wake County, that average is one out of eight residents.
- Black Americans are [more likely](#) to have asthma, heart disease, and hypertension, all of which are making them particularly vulnerable to negative outcomes after contracting coronavirus.

In Black communities across North Carolina, people are impacted by much higher rates of diabetes. Diabetes patients are [much more likely](#) to experience serious complications from coronavirus.

- Black North Carolinians are [significantly more likely](#) to have a diabetes diagnosis at any stage of their lives than any other group in the state. On average, Black American adults are 25 percent more likely to have diabetes than North Carolinians in general.
- There is a tendency for younger Black Americans to live with diseases that are usually more common in older Americans. For instance, Black people ages 35 to 49 are [40 percent more likely](#) to have diabetes than their white counterparts in the same age group.
- Every one of the ten counties in North Carolina with the highest percentage of Black residents has a rate of diabetes diagnoses [higher than the state average](#).

ADDRESSING COVID-19, RACISM, POLICE BRUTALITY AS PUBLIC HEALTH CRISES

Not only are Black Americans at a greater risk of certain diseases, they also face racial inequities and racial disparities that impact their safety, economic wellbeing and health.

Police brutality against Black Americans is a public health crisis that must be addressed.

- In a May 29th statement from the [American Medical Association](#), the group made clear that “racially marginalized communities are disproportionately subject to police force, and there is a correlation between policing and adverse health outcomes.”

There is a consistent, structural issue of [excessive force](#) used by law enforcement resulting in “deaths, injuries, trauma, and stress” within marginalized communities.

- The American Public Health Association has [noted](#) that attempts to reduce police brutality by improving law enforcement tactics from within have lacked a “public health frame,” which has prevented a path toward improvement.

The mental health of Black Americans is directly and adversely impacted by consistent exposure to instances of racial inequities in policing and violence against Black communities by law enforcement.

- Groundbreaking [research](#) released in 2018 confirmed that Black Americans experience more negative mental health days each year as a result of police brutality. Researchers compared a national mental health survey with the timing and location of police killings within Black communities, which revealed a correlation between these instances and mental health that did not exist in white communities.

URGENT ACTION NEEDED

Longstanding racial bias in the American health care system has caused Black patients to receive worse care than white patients. Our elected officials can take steps that help to ensure that all North Carolinians, regardless of race, receive the care they need.

1. **Protect the Affordable Care Act**

After the Affordable Care Act took effect, the percentage of nonelderly adults without health insurance fell by 40 percent nationally. In 2013, 25.8 percent of Black Americans were uninsured compared to 14.8 percent of white Americans. By 2017, the gap in coverage had been reduced to roughly half.

2. **Expand Medicaid**

Medicaid expansion would help [continue reducing](#) racial inequalities in insurance rates in North Carolina. While racial disparities in access to consistent, affordable health care shrunk nationwide, states that expanded Medicaid experienced the [largest reduction](#) in the gap in insurance rates between Black and white residents.

In North Carolina, the [uninsured rate](#) among non-elderly Black people in North Carolina dropped from 20.6 percent to 12 percent from 2013 to 2018. From 2017 to 2018, it stayed the same at 12 percent. States that expanded Medicaid continued to see uninsured rates drop in Black communities during this same time period.

3. **Demand Greater Transparency**

As the virus continues to spread, some federal lawmakers are seeking greater transparency in data and a more equitable response across all communities. In a March 27 [letter](#), five members of Congress called on the Trump administration “to account for existing racial disparities in health care access and how persistent inequities may exacerbate these disparities” throughout the pandemic. North Carolina lawmakers should join these calls for greater transparency.

4. **Demand Action Against Police Brutality**

Health care advocates organizations must take action against police brutality and the killings of innocent people within Black communities as they would any other public health crisis. The [American Medical Association](#) recommends mandating the “reporting of legal intervention deaths and law enforcement officer homicides to public health agencies” as a step toward understanding police brutality as an affront against the overall health of Black Americans. Law enforcement must be held accountable for the lives lost and the toll this crisis has taken on the health of countless individuals, in North Carolina and across the country.