

DAY 3: How Your Race Affects Your Health

The COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on the disproportionately high number of deaths in the black community. In an interview with Jimena Loveluck, the Washtenaw County Health Officer shared “We know viruses do not discriminate based on location, race, ethnicity, or national origin,” said Washtenaw County Health Officer Jimena Loveluck. “However, viruses like COVID-19 can highlight health disparities that are deeply rooted in our society.” In Washtenaw County, 43% of hospitalized COVID-19 patients as of April 27 were black, even though they only make up 12% of the county’s residents. The latest county figures show 27% of the deaths and 36% of the total confirmed cases involve black patients.

According to the NY Times 1619 Project, “[racial health disparities are foundational as democracy itself](#).” Socioeconomic status and institutional racism lead to disparities across living conditions, limit access to quality health care, and contribute to chronic stress. The factors lead to shorter life spans and higher likelihood of adverse health outcomes for people living in poverty and people of color.

Healthcare costs also make up a significant portion of a household’s annual budget, placing additional stress on families that may or may not have insurance and access to quality care. In developing the 2019 [ALICE Report](#), the most significant driver of increases in the Household Survival Budget from 2010 to 2017 was health care costs, including an average 59 percent increase in out-of-pocket costs.

[In Washtenaw County](#), we are seeing how race and income can disproportionality impact individuals’ health. Importantly, the study cited below illustrate that this is not a result of individual choices, but rather institutional racism:

Published in the journal, Nature, a recent study found that [millions of black people have been affected by racial bias in health-care algorithms used by many U.S. hospitals](#), resulting in black people being less likely than white people who were equally sick being referred to programs.

An article in [Concentrate Magazine](#) highlighted multiple reasons for the health disparities including higher density living areas, service jobs that don’t allow working remotely or taking paid time off and more.

Did you Know? COVID-19 is having a disproportionate impact on Black and Brown people here in our community. Local health department data illustrates this reality.

Washtenaw County	Overall	Deaths from COVID-19
Population	367,000	77
% White	74%	69%
% Black	12%	27%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	.1%	3%
Latinx (all races)	5%	3%
American Indian or Alaska Native	.4%	0%

Source: <https://www.washtenaw.org/3108/Cases>

Today's Challenge:

Option 1: Listen to Ray Rion, executive director of Packard Health, in this [Washtenaw United interview](#) explore why the coronavirus pandemic has been particularly difficult for those who struggle with access to health care, and how Packard Health is shifting its service delivery in response.

Option 2: Read this [blog post](#) about how Kelly Stupple, a child health advocate with Success by 6 Great Start Collaborative in Washtenaw, acts like a 'health care GPS' helping underserved children get the health and dental care they need to be successful.

Option 3: [Watch David. R Williams, a public health sociologist, on the TED stage](#) discuss why race and deep-rooted systemic racism have such a profound impact on health.

Option 4: Hear Dr. Camara Phyllis Jones explain social determinants of health through her [analogy of the "cliff of good health"](#) in a video collaboration with the Urban Institute.

Option 5: Check out this [Fact Sheet from the American Psychological Association](#) exploring the compounding impact of socioeconomic status and race on health.

Option 6: [Hear the story of Henrietta Lacks](#), an African American woman whose cells have been used to test the effects of radiation and poisons, to study the human genome, to learn more about how viruses work, and played a crucial role in the development of the polio vaccine. It is most important to note that, while Ms. Lacks' cells have been the source of life-saving medical solutions, no consent was obtained to culture her cells, nor were she or her family compensated for their extraction or use.

Share your reflections on today's topic on social media using the hashtag [#unitedforequity](#) and tag [@uwwashtenaw](#).