

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- In North Carolina, **Black residents account for [39 percent](#) of confirmed coronavirus patients and [38 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

INTRODUCTION

Across the country, health officials are seeing a [disproportionate number](#) of Black Americans and other minorities being diagnosed with coronavirus. This has resulted in a staggeringly large percentage of deaths from this pandemic 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 coronavirus is not affecting all North Carolinians the same. To the contrary, Black residents are experiencing disturbingly worse outcomes than White residents.

While [21.4 percent](#) of residents are Black, [39 percent](#) of the confirmed cases of coronavirus in North Carolina are from Black residents as of April 7th. Further, [38 percent](#) of deaths -- 38 people -- from coronavirus in North Carolina have been Black.

Sadly, these outcomes fit with historical health care disparities 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 1 out of 8 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% 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 Americans 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](#).

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.