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THE HEALTH OF AFRICAN AMERICANS IN CALIFORNIA

Demographics

Of the 34.5 million Americans who call California their home, African Americans represent 6.7% (2.31 Million), disproportionately less than their percentage of the total U.S. population (12.3%).ⁱ Nearly 85% of the State's African American population reside in five major metropolitan areas – Los Angeles, San Diego, Alameda, Sacramento and Inland Empire – the five areas where there are chapters of the California Black Health Network.

Infant Mortality

The infant mortality rate continues to be one of the most widely used indicators of the overall health status of a community. In 2000, there were a total of 2,884 infant deaths and 531,285 live births among California residents. This represents an overall infant mortality rate of 5.4 deaths per 1,000 live births. The infant mortality rate for non-Hispanic Black populations was 12.8 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2000.

HIV/AIDS

The HIV epidemic in the United States began among white gay men over 15 years ago. Today, HIV threatens the fabric of the African American community. Nationwide, over half of all persons with HIV disease are African Americans and over 65% of all women with HIV disease are African Americans. In California, there were 127,850 cases of AIDS as of January 31, 2003. Of these, 22,350 were African American adult cases (17% of all adult cases) and 191 cases were among African American children (31 percent of all childhood cases)ⁱⁱ. African Americans have the highest death from HIV than any other racial/ethnic group (17.4 per 100,000 population).

Obesity

Childhood obesity and physical inactivity have reached epidemic proportions in California. Throughout the State, 26.5 percent of all children under age 18 are overweight and 39.6 percent of the children are unfitⁱⁱⁱ. The problem of being overweight impacts communities of color excessively. Statewide, some 28.6 percent of African American children are overweight and 46.0 percent are unfit.

Tobacco Use

If current patterns continue, an estimated 1.6 million African Americans who are now under the age of 18 will become regular smokers. Approximately 500,000 of those smokers will die of a smoking-related disease. The incidence of lung cancer for African American males is more than 54% higher than that of white males^{iv}. Smoking is more prevalent among African American women in California than among any

other race gender group. Nearly 27 percent of African American women in California smoke, compared with 19.2 percent of white women^v.

Diabetes

In 1997, more than 1.25 million adults in Californians were diagnosed with diabetes. For persons who are in the 55-64 age group, African American males are 3 times more likely to have diabetes as all men in this age group, and African American women are 2.5 times as likely to be diagnosed with diabetes^{vi}.

Heart Disease and Stroke

Both in California and nationwide, heart disease and stroke kill more African American men and women than any other disease^{vii}. Heart disease occurs at an earlier age in African Americans. Below the age of 50, death rates are 50% higher in African American men and 100% higher in African American women than their white counterparts.

Insurance Coverage

Not surprising, African Americans lag well behind white regarding private health insurance. While 70.8 percent of whites have private health insurance, only 54.1 percent of African Americans and 46.1 percent of Hispanics have private health insurance^{viii}.

Correspondingly, there is a greater reliance among African Americans and Hispanic Americans in California on Medicaid (Medi-Cal). African Americans comprise 11.36 percent of all Medi-Cal and Hispanic persons represent 47.32 percent of Medi-Cal beneficiaries. Thus, the impact of reductions in eligibility proposed by the current state administration will have a disproportionate impact on communities of color.

Conclusion

There are significant differences in the health status of Californians. These disparities exist among racial and ethnic categories. Those of us who are committed to a mission of eliminating health disparities must be vigilant in monitoring and disseminating health data trends by ethnicity at the State and local level. The California Black Health Network will continue to work to improve the health status of people of African descent by influencing policies and programs that advance health promotion and disease prevention.

References:

ⁱ U.S. Bureau of the Census, "California Quick Facts from the U.S. Census Bureau", found at <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06000.html>

ⁱⁱ California Department of Health Services, Office of AIDS, "Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS Only). HIV-AIDS Reporting System, Surveillance Report for California, January 31, 2003

ⁱⁱⁱ California Center for Public Health Advocacy, "Overweight and Unfit Children in California Assembly Districts" Legislative District Policy Brief #1

^{iv} American Lung Association "Fact Sheet: African Americans and Lung Disease" found at http://lungusa.org/diseases/africanlung_factsheet.html

^v Gazzaniga JM, Kao C, Cowling DW, Fox P, Davis D, Wright WE, Cardiovascular Disease Risk Factors Among California Adults 1984-1996 CORE Program, University of California San Francisco and California Department of Health Services, Sacramento, CA 1998

^{vi} California Department of Health Services, Diabetes Control Program, "Research and Statistics" located at <http://www.caldiabetes.org/html/rs-factsfigures.cfm> accessed on February 27, 2003

^{vii} California Department of Health Services, Vital Statistics Section, Advance Report: California Vital Statistics 1996. Sacramento, CA February 1998

^{viii} Department of Health & Human Services "Private Health Insurance Coverage among Persons under 65 Years of Age, According to Selected Characteristics" [Health, United States 2002. page 308](#)