

Health Disparities in the Medicare Population: Atrial Fibrillation

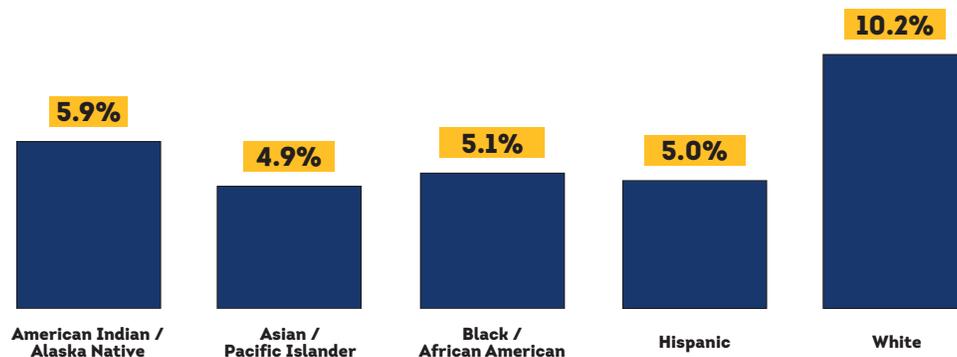
Atrial fibrillation (AF) is the most common type of arrhythmia. Arrhythmia is defined as an irregular heart rhythm or irregular heartbeat. Those living with AF may have symptoms such as heart palpitations, shortness of breath, dizziness, fatigue, and or chest pains or may not feel any symptoms at all. AF increases your chances of suffering from a stroke. Risk factors for AF include hypertension, diabetes, obesity, and advancing age. Treatments for AF depend on the frequency and severity of symptoms. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately 2.7-6.1 million adults have AF.¹



In 2014, 8.0% of all Medicare Fee-For-Service (FFS) beneficiaries had a diagnosis of AF. Among the 65 and older population, AF prevalence was higher among males (10.5%) than females (8.4%). As shown in the figure, AF prevalence for beneficiaries 65 years and older was highest among Non-Hispanic Whites (10.2%), followed by American Indians/Alaska Natives (5.9%), Hispanics (5.0%), Blacks/African Americans (5.1%), and Asian Pacific Islanders (4.9%).²

Medicare Part D covers AF treatment medications such as beta blockers, calcium channel blockers, antiarrhythmic agents, and blood thinners. September is **Atrial Fibrillation Awareness Month**, which focuses on increasing the awareness of AF risk factors.

Prevalence of Atrial Fibrillation among Medicare Beneficiaries 65 Years and Older by Race/Ethnicity, 2014



Source: Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. Chronic Condition Data Warehouse (CCW)

Note: Population is limited to Medicare Fee-For-Service beneficiaries. RTI Race Code used for analysis. Racial categories of White, Black/African American, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Asian/Pacific Islander are classified as non-Hispanic. Hispanic ethnicity includes all race categories. “**” indicates that the data have been suppressed because there are fewer than 11 Medicare beneficiaries in the cell.

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. http://www.cdc.gov/dhdsdp/data_statistics/fact_sheets/fs_atrial_fibrillation.htm
 2. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. Chronic Conditions. <http://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/Statistics-Trends-and-Reports/Chronic-Conditions/index.html>
 3. National Institutes of Health: National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/health-topics/topics/af>