

Health Disparities in the Medicare Population: Hyperlipidemia

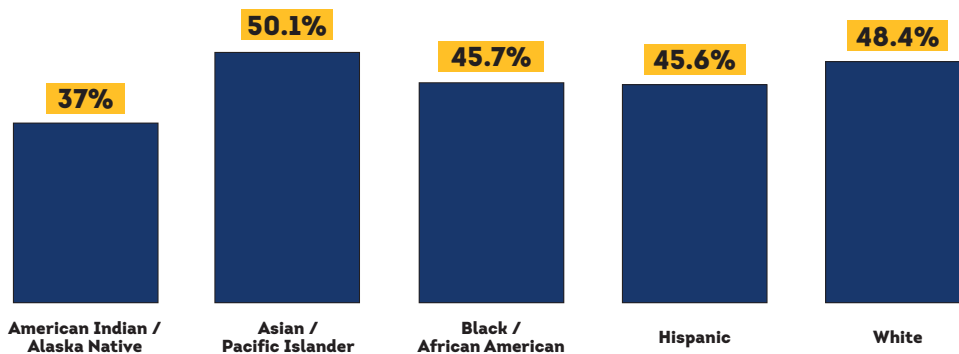
Hyperlipidemia, known as high cholesterol, is an umbrella term for conditions that cause elevated levels of lipids (fat) in the blood. Cholesterol, a fat-like substance, is created by the body and is also found in various foods. However, when the body has too much cholesterol, low density lipoproteins (LDL) create plaque which can narrow the blood vessels. Narrow blood vessels make blood flow to the heart more difficult, and may lead to a heart attack. Cholesterol levels may be reduced by increased physical activity and healthier eating. Physicians may also prescribe various medicines, such as cholesterol absorption inhibitors, to reduce cholesterol levels. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately 71 million adults have high levels of LDL.¹



In 2014, 44.7% of all Medicare Fee-For-Service (FFS) beneficiaries had claims with a diagnosis of hyperlipidemia.² Among the 65 and older population, hyperlipidemia prevalence is similar among males (47.8%) and females (48.0%). As shown in the figure, hyperlipidemia prevalence for beneficiaries 65 years and older was highest among Asian/ Pacific Islander beneficiaries (50.1%), followed by non-Hispanic White (48.4%), African American (45.7%), Hispanic (45.6%), and American Indian/ Alaska Native (37.0%) beneficiaries.

Medicare Part B covers blood screening for cholesterol, lipid, and triglyceride levels every five years. The CDC created the **High Cholesterol Educational Materials for Patients**, which provides useful tools and resources on ways to reduce cholesterol levels.

Prevalence of Hyperlipidemia 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.

1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. http://www.cdc.gov/cholesterol/materials_for_patients.htm

2 Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. Chronic Conditions. <https://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/Statistics-Trends-and-Reports/Chronic-Conditions/index.html>

3 National Institutes of Health: <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/resources/heart/heart-cholesterol-hbc-what-html#drug>

4 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: http://www.cdc.gov/cholesterol/ldl_hdl.htm