

Health Disparities in the Medicare Population

Arthritis



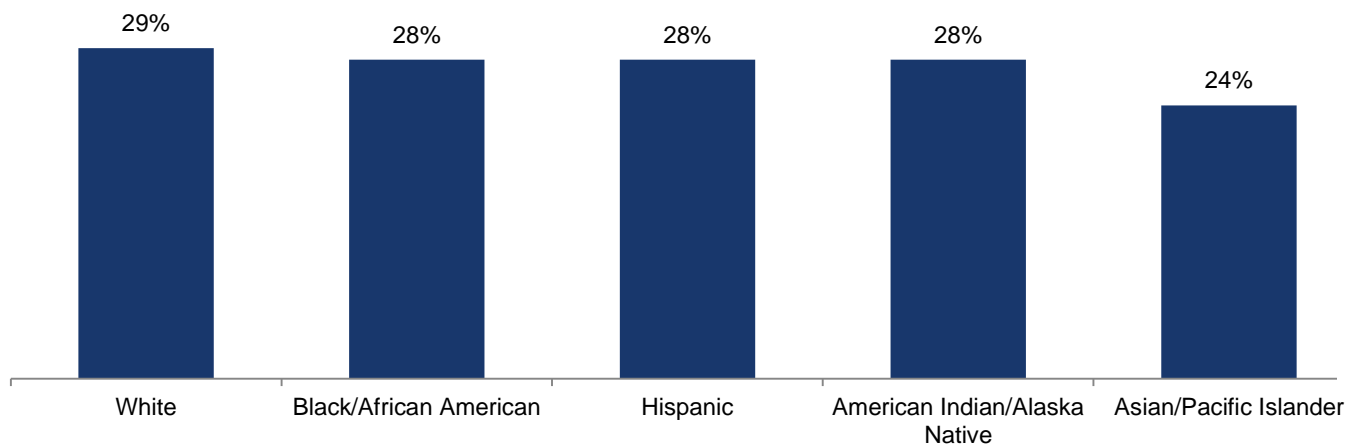
Arthritis is an umbrella term for any disorder that affects the body's joints. Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most commonly diagnosed form of arthritis.¹ Symptoms of OA include pain, redness, swelling, and stiffness of the joint.¹ Damage to a joint can contribute to the development of OA, for example, occupations that involve repetitive knee bending.² Another form of arthritis is rheumatoid arthritis (RA). RA is caused by an autoimmune disorder that can affect joints, bones, and internal organs.³ RA is characterized by inflammation and loss of function in a connecting or supporting structure of the body.³

OA/RA symptoms may be alleviated by the use of anti-inflammatory drugs or topical/oral analgesic medications, heat/cold therapies, splints/braces, assistive devices, or joint replacement surgery.³ In addition, losing even a small amount of weight can reduce the risk of developing, or worsening, arthritis symptoms and improve the quality of life for those living with arthritis.² Frequent strength training to build and maintain muscle tissue around the joints combined with range-of-motion exercises provide support and protection of joints.³

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report that arthritis affects 52.5 million or more than 1 in 5 U.S. adults.² OA is the most common cause of disability in the nation.² The risk of developing arthritis increases with age with 49.7% of those aged 65 years or older having some form of arthritis.² Arthritis prevalence also varies by gender with women accounting for 60% of all people with arthritis.² The chart below shows the prevalence of arthritis (OA and RA) among Medicare Fee-For-Service beneficiaries by race and ethnicity. Compared to Asian/Pacific Islander Medicare beneficiaries (24%) a higher percentage of White (29%), Black/African American (28%), Native American/Alaska Native (28%), and Hispanic (28%) Medicare beneficiaries had arthritis.⁴

Medicare Part B covers an annual wellness visit which includes a review of functional ability and level of safety however only 9.8% of Medicare beneficiaries utilized this service in 2012. Medicare Part B coverage can also assist in obtaining braces, walkers, and other durable medical equipment. More information on services covered by Medicare can be found in [Medicare and You 2016](#).

Prevalence of Arthritis (OA/RA) in Medicare Beneficiaries by Race/Ethnicity, 2012⁴



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. National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases. http://www.niams.nih.gov/Health_Info/Arthritis/default.asp
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <http://www.cdc.gov/arthritis/>
3. National Institute on Aging. <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/arthritis-advice>
4. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. Chronic Conditions. <http://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/Statistics-Trends-and-Reports/Chronic-Conditions/index.html>