

Health Disparities in the Medicare Population

Alzheimer's disease



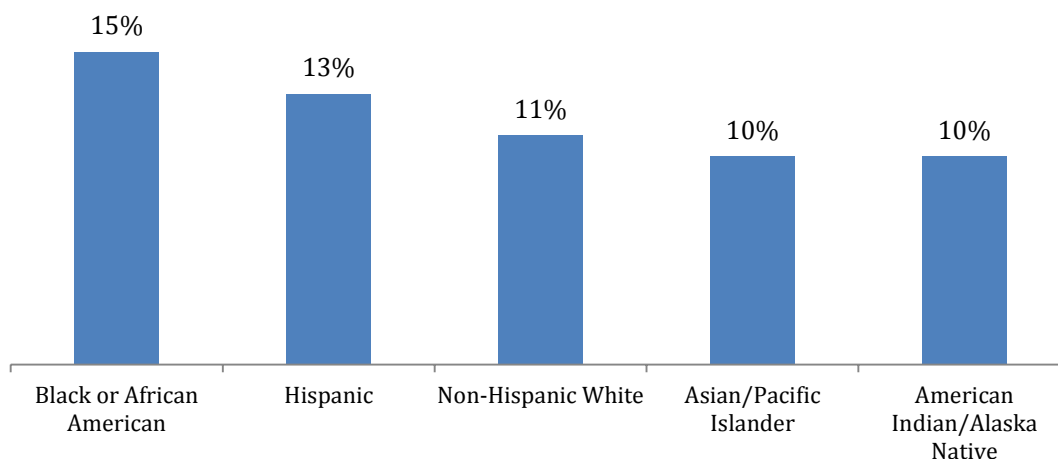
Dementia is an umbrella term for a wide range of progressive brain diseases which are characterized by the onset of behavioral, cognitive, and emotional impairments primarily in older adults.¹ The most common form of dementia in older people is Alzheimer's disease which slowly destroys memory and thinking skills until an individual can no longer perform even the simplest tasks of daily living.¹ There is currently no cure for Alzheimer's disease, no definitive cause, and the only certain risk factor is aging. According to Centers for Disease Control Prevention (CDC) there are 5 million Americans living with Alzheimer's disease today but, by 2050, that number is projected to rise to 14 million

partially due to the aging of the U.S. population.² Alzheimer's disease is the 5th leading cause of death in 65 – 85 year old adults.² National Institute on Aging (NIA) leads research efforts in United States in the search to discover preventive, protective, or treatment measures to combat this devastating illness.¹ September is internationally recognized as World Alzheimer's Month to raise awareness and garner support for those affected by the disease.

In 2012, 10% of all fee-for-service Medicare beneficiaries and 11% of those over the age of 65 had a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia. Among elderly beneficiaries age 65 or older, Black beneficiaries had a higher prevalence of dementia (15%) than other racial groups. The lowest rates were observed in the Asian/Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaska Native populations (both 10%), as shown on the chart below.

Medicare helps cover doctors' fees and many prescription drugs, inpatient hospital care, up to 100 days of skilled nursing home care, as well as hospice care for those who are determined by a doctor to be near the end of life. Friends and family members are in a good position to see the signs that may signal the onset of a degenerative brain disease; however beneficiaries should also talk to their providers about available screening measures. An annual wellness visit (covered by Medicare every 12 months) affords medical providers an opportunity to detect any cognitive impairment or to determine a treatment plan that can improve the quality of life for a beneficiary with Alzheimer's disease.

Prevalence of Alzheimer's disease or Dementia among Medicare Beneficiaries over age 65 by Race/Ethnicity, 2012



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.

1. About Alzheimer's disease: Alzheimer's Basics. <https://www.nia.nih.gov/alzheimers/topics/alzheimers-basics>
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Healthy Aging/Healthy Brain Initiative. <http://www.cdc.gov/aging/aginginfo/alzheimers.htm>
3. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. Chronic Conditions. <http://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/Statistics-Trends-and-Reports/Chronic-Conditions/index.html>