

Health Disparities in the Medicare Population

Stroke



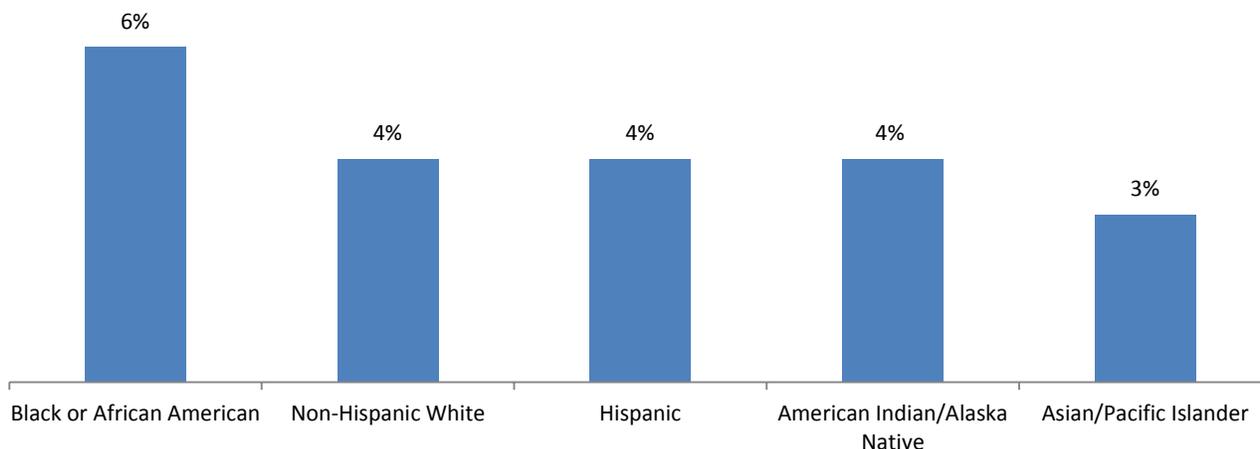
A stroke is a medical emergency in which brain cells die following a sudden interruption in the flow of oxygen to the brain.¹ There are two types of stroke – hemorrhagic and ischemic.² Ischemic stroke, which occurs in around 85% of cases, is caused by a blood clot that plugs a blood vessel in the brain depriving cells of essential nutrients and oxygen.³ A less common type of stroke, hemorrhagic stroke, occurs when an artery in the brain bursts allowing blood to leak out and pool, exerting an increasing amount of pressure on brain cells until they die.³ Symptoms of stroke occur suddenly and include: numbness or weakness of the face, arm, or leg (especially on one side of the body); confusion, trouble speaking or understanding speech; trouble seeing in one or both eyes; trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination; and severe headache with no known cause.¹

Individuals can also suffer from a Transient Ischemic Attack (TIA), also known as a "mini-stroke" or "warning stroke".² Symptoms of a TIA are like those of ischemic stroke but they come and go quickly, typically within an hour.² According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than 795,000 people in the United States have a stroke every year, including approximately 130,000 deaths.³ Experiencing a TIA increases the risk for having a more serious stroke and around 185,000 strokes each year occur in those who have had a previous stroke or TIA.³

Among fee-for-service beneficiaries age 65 or older, African Americans had the highest prevalence of stroke (6%) compared to the other racial/ethnic groups. The prevalence rates for stroke observed in the remaining racial and ethnic groups were fairly even, at 4%, with the exception of Asian/Pacific Islander beneficiaries, who had the lowest prevalence of stroke (3%), as shown on the chart below.⁴

Although stroke risk increases with age, strokes can—and do—occur at any age and stroke continues to be one of the top 10 leading causes of serious long-term disability.³ Common heart disorders, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure are major risk factors for stroke.³ Coronary artery disease, for example, increases the risk for stroke because a build-up of plaque in the arteries can block the flow of oxygen-rich blood to the brain.³ In order to combat this, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services launched an initiative to help fight stroke and heart disease. [Million Hearts@](#) brings together communities, health systems, nonprofit organizations, federal agencies, and private-sector partners from across the country with the goal of preventing one million heart attacks and strokes by 2017.

Prevalence of Strokes and Transient Ischemic Attacks in Medicare Beneficiaries age 65 and over 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. Health and Aging. Age Page. Stroke. <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication/stroke>
2. American Stroke Association <http://www.strokeassociation.org/STROKEORG/>
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <http://www.cdc.gov/stroke/index.htm>
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>