

Asthma Disparities in Medicare Fee-For-Service Beneficiaries



Asthma is a chronic lung disease that inflames and narrows the airways of the lungs resulting in recurring periods of wheezing, shortness of breath, chest tightening, and coughing. Causes are unknown, but individuals with a family history of asthma are more likely to be diagnosed. There is no cure for asthma, but physicians may prescribe inhalers, nebulizers, and other medications to control and manage asthma. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 19.2 million adults in

the U.S. are currently living with asthma.¹ Among U.S. adults, females account for approximately two-thirds of asthma deaths and rates of hospitalization and death due to asthma are three times higher in Blacks/ African Americans than Whites.²

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services' (CMS) Chronic Condition public-use data indicates that the period prevalence for asthma has increased over time, from 4.7% in 2009 to 5.1% in 2018, among Medicare fee-for-service (FFS) beneficiaries.³ In 2018, 8% of beneficiaries under 65 years old had claims with a diagnosis of asthma. Among those under the age of 65, asthma is higher among females (11%) than males (5%). Beneficiaries with both Medicare and Medicaid have a higher prevalence (7%) than those with Medicare only (4%).⁴ As shown in the Figure 1, the prevalence of asthma was highest among Black/African American beneficiaries (7%), followed by American Indian/Alaska Native (6%), Hispanic (6%), Asian/ Pacific Islander (5%), and White (5%) beneficiaries in 2018.

The number of Medicare FFS enrollees with asthma also varied by geographic areas (Figure 2). Most of the states' prevalence rates were 4-5%, while Alaska, South Dakota and Wyoming had the lowest prevalence rate (3%) and Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island had the highest prevalence rate (7%).

Figure 1. Prevalence of Asthma among Medicare FFS Beneficiaries by Race/Ethnicity, 2018⁴

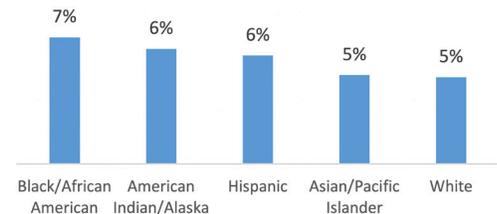


Figure 2. Prevalence of Asthma among Medicare FFS Beneficiaries by States, 2018⁴

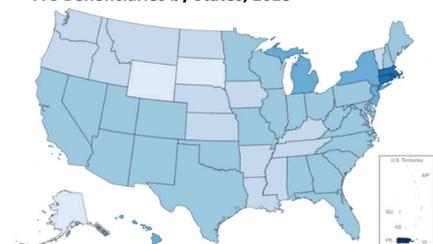
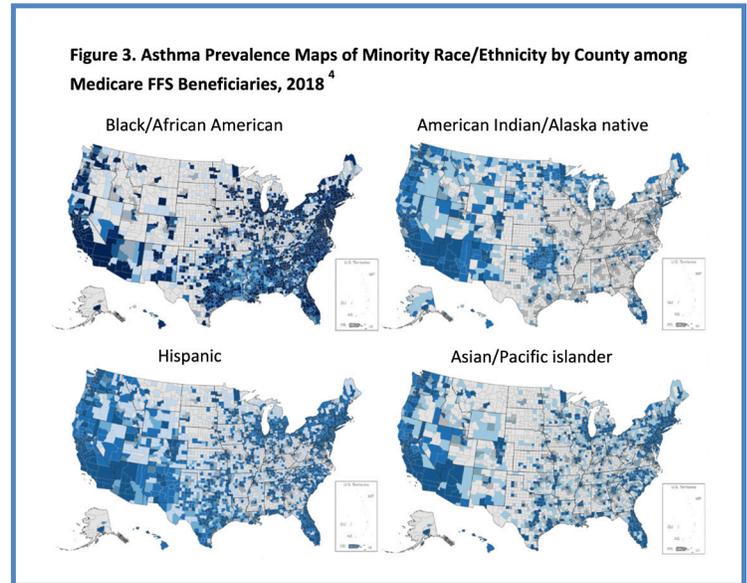


Figure 3 shows geographic differences in asthma prevalence among minority racial and ethnic groups. Black/African American's asthma prevalence for 2018 was higher in the south and up the middle Atlantic and some areas of the west. For American Indian/Alaska Native, the prevalence was more concentrated in the west, with emphasis around the southwest area and in Oklahoma, while for Hispanics it was in more spread across the country from the west to the south and around east north central and along the east coast. And, for Asian/Pacific Islander population, the concentration was along the west coast with small groups throughout the south, northeast, and east north central.



May is [National Asthma and Allergy Awareness Month](#) and the CDC has created an Asthma Awareness Month Toolkit that can be used take control of and raise awareness about asthma. [Medicare Part B](#) covers nebulizers (and some medicines used in nebulizers if considered reasonable and necessary) as [durable medical equipment](#) that your doctor prescribes for use in your home.

Beneficiary Resources

- [Learn How to Control Asthma](#)
- [Is my test, item, or service covered? - Chronic care management services](#)
- [Asthma Tip Sheets](#)
- [Breathe easier with Medicaid and CHIP coverage](#)
- [Asthma and African Americans](#)

Provider Resources

- [Improving Asthma Control Learning Collaborative](#)
- [Medicare Coverage Database](#)
- [Asthma Care Quick Reference: Diagnosing and Managing Asthma](#)
- [Asthma Care Coverage Initiative](#)
- [National Asthma Education and Prevention Program \(NAEPP\)](#)

References/Sources

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/asthma.htm>
2. National Vital Statistics Reports, Vol. 68, No. 9, June 24, 2019. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr68/nvsr68_09_tables-508.pdf
3. Chronic Conditions Data Warehouse. Pulmonary Conditions - Trends, 2009 - 2018. https://www2.ccwdata.org/web/guest/medicare-charts/medicare-chronic-condition-charts/#b1_age_current_year
4. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. Mapping Medicare Disparities Tool. <https://data.cms.gov/mapping-medicare-disparities>

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