

Health Care Discrimination Harms Communities of Color in Maine

Rapidly escalating medical costs and insurance premiums, rising numbers of people without coverage, and rip-offs by monopolistic private insurers have dominated the Maine political dialogue surrounding President Barack Obama's plans for comprehensive health reform. On Capitol Hill, the American public is witnessing an historic clash of Washington special interest groups fighting to protect their revenue streams. Yet no one has more at stake than the 103 million people of color in the U.S.,¹ including the 59,000 in Maine.² Throughout the nation's history, communities of color have been forced to accept health care that bears little resemblance to what is experienced by members of more advantaged groups. For people of color in Maine and nationwide, life is shorter, chronic illness more prevalent and disability more common. These are predictable side-effects of a health care system that provides these communities in Maine with narrower opportunities for regular health services, fewer treatment options and lower-quality care.

Despite growing evidence of racial disparities in health status and medical services, no system exists in Maine for collecting state and local data on disparities. As a result, many questions about the health of minorities in state remain unanswered. Life expectancy for African Americans in Maine is 6 to 10 years shorter than that of whites.³

Maine Disparities

- In Maine, about 8.8 percent of Latino adults have been diagnosed with diabetes, more than 10 percent higher than the rate for whites.⁴
- Almost 17 percent of adult Latinos in Maine have asthma, compared to 10 percent of whites.⁵
- In Maine, 30 percent of African American women received no early prenatal care, compared to 18 percent of Latinas and 12 percent of whites.⁶
- The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that 8.3 percent of Maine's labor force is unemployed.⁷
- In Maine, 118,935 people were uninsured in 2007.⁸
- Health insurance premiums for Maine working families have skyrocketed, increasing 90 percent from 2000 to 2007.⁹
- The full cost of employer-sponsored health insurance in Maine is projected to grow at an annual rate of 9.3 percent, compared to a 1 percent increase in income.¹⁰
- About 70,000 working non-elderly adults in Maine do not have health insurance. That comprises 72 percent of the total non-elderly uninsured population.¹¹
- In Maine, the AIDS case rate per 100,000 population is 59.8 for African Americans, compared to 25.5 for Latinos and 3.3 for whites.¹²

Endnotes

¹ US Census Bureau, "USA QuickFacts," 2008. Accessed at <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/00000.html>.

² Ibid.

³ National Center for Health Statistics, "Health, United States, 2008 With Chartbook" Hyattsville, MD: 2009.

⁴ Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Public Health and Science, Office of Women's Health. Quick Health Data Online, 2008.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ National Center for Health Statistics, "Health, United States, 2008 With Chartbook" Hyattsville, MD: 2009.

⁷ Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Local Area Unemployment Statistics." Accessed at <http://www.bls.gov/web/lauhsthl.htm>.

⁸ Kaiser Family Foundation, "Health Insurance Coverage of the Total Population, states (2006-2007), U.S. (2007)." Accessed at <http://www.statehealthfacts.org/comparebar.jsp?ind=125&cat=3>.

⁹ Families USA, "Premiums versus Paychecks," September 2008. Accessed at <http://www.familiesusa.org/resources/publications/reports/premiums-vs-paychecks-2008.html>.

¹⁰ New America Foundation, "The State of State Health: The Cost of Failure (2007)" Accessed at <http://statehealth.newamerica.net/>.

¹¹ Peter Harbage, Ben Furnas, "Health Care in Crisis," Center for American Progress, May 4, 2009. Accessed at http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2009/05/working_uninsured_map.html.

¹² The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, "Key Health Indicators by Race/Ethnicity and State," 2009 update. Accessed at <http://www.kff.org/minorityhealth/7633.cfm>.