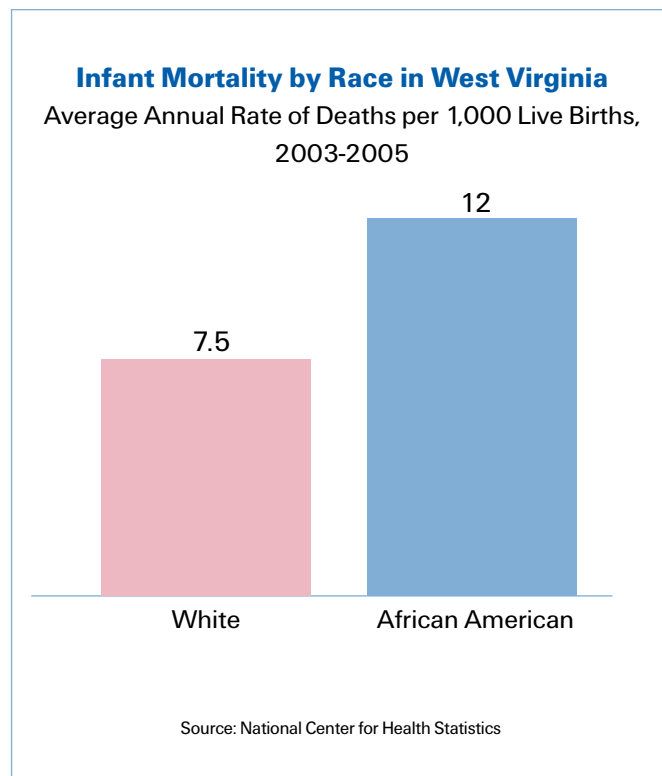


# Health Care Discrimination Harms Communities of Color in West Virginia

Rapidly escalating medical costs and insurance premiums, rising numbers of people without coverage, and rip-offs by monopolistic private insurers have dominated the West Virginia 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.,<sup>1</sup> including the 116,000 in West Virginia.<sup>2</sup> 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 West Virginia

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 West Virginia with narrower opportunities for regular health services, fewer treatment options and lower-quality care.

The infant mortality rate, a leading indicator of community health and well-being, illustrates the huge health disparities between whites and other racial and ethnic groups in West Virginia. The infant death rate for whites is 7.5 per 1,000 live births, compared with 12 for African Americans.<sup>3</sup> Life expectancy for African Americans in West Virginia is 6 to 10 years shorter than that for whites.<sup>4</sup>



## West Virginia Disparities

- In West Virginia, about 18 percent of African-American adults have diabetes, almost 55 percent higher than the rate for whites.<sup>5</sup>
- In West Virginia, 23 percent of Latina women received no early prenatal care, compared with 32 percent for African Americans and 17 percent for whites.<sup>6</sup>
- The infant mortality rate for African Americans in West Virginia is 60 percent higher than that of whites.<sup>7</sup>
- The mortality rate for African Americans in West Virginia is four times the rate for Latinos.<sup>8</sup>
- Despite growing evidence of racial disparities in health status and medical services, no system exists in West Virginia for collecting comprehensive state and local data on disparities. As a result, many questions about the health of people of color in West Virginia remain unanswered. For example, it is not known how many African Americans or Latinos (compared to whites) have forgone care because they can't afford it.
- The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that 8.6 percent of West Virginia's labor force is unemployed.<sup>9</sup>
- In West Virginia, 249,384 people were uninsured in 2007.<sup>10</sup>
- Health insurance premiums for West Virginia working families have skyrocketed, increasing 75 percent from 2000 to 2007.<sup>11</sup>
- The full cost of employer-sponsored health insurance in West Virginia is projected to grow at an annual rate of 8.5 percent, compared to a 1.8 percent increase in income.<sup>12</sup>
- About 140,000 working non-elderly adults in West Virginia lack health insurance. That comprises 61 percent of the total non-elderly uninsured population.<sup>13</sup>

### West Virginia Racial and Ethnic Disparities by Health Indicator

Health Indicator	White	African American	Latino
Infant Mortality Rate (deaths per 1,000 live births)	7.5	12	-
Diabetes Mortality Rate (deaths per 100,000 population)	33.3	85.3	-
Annual AIDS Case Rate (per 100,000 population)	3.7	41.8	6.7
Living in Poverty	19%	32%	-
Enrolled in Medicaid	17%	32%	-

Note: - denotes insufficient data in state.

Source: The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. "Key Health Indicators by Race/Ethnicity and State," 2009 update.

## Endnotes

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

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

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

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Public Health and Science, Office of Women's Health. Quick Health Data Online, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Cara James, et al., "Putting Women's Health Care Disparities on the Map: Examining Racial and Ethnic Disparities at the State Level," Kaiser Family Foundation, June 2009. Accessed at <http://www.kff.org/minorityhealth/upload/7886.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> National Center for Health Statistics, "Health, United States, 2008 With Chartbook" Hyattsville, MD: 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Local Area Unemployment Statistics." Accessed at <http://www.bls.gov/web/lauhsthl.htm>.

<sup>10</sup> 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>.

<sup>11</sup> Families USA, "Premiums versus Paychecks," September 2008. Accessed at <http://www.familiesusa.org/resources/publications/reports/premiums-vs-paychecks-2008.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation, "Key Health Indicators by Race/Ethnicity and State," 2009 update.

<sup>13</sup> 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](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2009/05/working_uninsured_map.html).