

# Alcohol-related Health Disparities



## The Problem

The negative consequences and harm from alcohol use continue to disproportionately impact racial and ethnic minorities in the United States, despite consumption rates that are generally lower than Whites.

## Alcohol Consumption and Harm

- Whites report the highest rate of current alcohol use at 56.1%. This is defined as consuming at least one drink in the past 30 days. People reporting “more than one race” rank second at 47.5%, followed by American Indians and Alaska Natives at 44.7%, Hispanics at 42.1%, African Americans at 39.3%, and 35.2% for Asian Americans.<sup>1</sup>
- Although Non-Whites consume less alcohol than Whites, they experience higher levels of negative consequences from drinking because of higher poverty levels, unfair medical treatment, and racial/ethnic stigma.<sup>2</sup>
- Minority populations often have lower rates of treatment, engagement, retention, and satisfaction with alcohol-related medical care.<sup>3</sup> One study found that African Americans and Hispanics, especially those at higher levels of alcohol dependence, underutilized treatment services compared to whites, which may reflect larger disparities trends in access to care for minority groups.<sup>4</sup>
- Excessive alcohol consumption is the leading cause of preventable death among American Indians and Alaska Natives<sup>5</sup>, who in one study were more likely than members of other racial groups to have experienced an alcohol use disorder in the past year.<sup>6</sup>
- In 2009, one in seven (14.2%) African American adults were in need of alcohol treatment.<sup>7</sup>
- African Americans were two times more likely, and Hispanics three times more likely, than Whites to report alcohol dependence.<sup>8</sup> In addition, African American and Hispanic male drinkers have higher rates of alcohol-related problems such as cirrhosis mortality, compared to White male drinkers.<sup>9, 10</sup>
- Between 1984 and 1992, heavy drinking (defined as drinking five or more drinks at a sitting at least once a week) decreased among White males but remained stable among African American and Hispanic males.<sup>11</sup>
- Hispanic males are more likely than any other race to experience three or more alcohol problems. These rates are higher for African American males than for White males.<sup>12</sup>
- Although cirrhosis deaths among both White and African American drinkers have declined, the rate is still higher for African American males than for White males and for African American females than for White females.<sup>9</sup>

## Marketing and Advertisements

- Minority groups are disproportionately exposed to alcohol advertising compared to Whites.<sup>13</sup>
- African American magazines such as *Ebony* and *Essence* have higher proportions of alcohol advertisements than mainstream magazines such as *Life* and *Glamour*.<sup>14</sup>
- There are five times more alcohol advertisements in Latino neighborhoods than in predominantly White neighborhoods.<sup>13</sup>

- A survey of alcohol billboard ads in St. Louis found twice as many billboards in African American neighborhoods when compared to White neighborhoods.<sup>13</sup> In Atlanta, alcohol billboards were more prevalent in neighborhoods that were 50% or more African American and had higher proportions of female head of households.<sup>15</sup>
- In New York City, African American females in Central Harlem were at 13% higher risk than Whites of being a problem drinker due to their exposure to outdoor alcohol advertisements in their community.<sup>16</sup>

## Bottom Line

Additional research is needed to identify the underlying causes of racial and ethnic disparities from alcohol use. Also, the extent to which targeted marketing plays a role in normalizing drinking behavior among certain populations, along with the effect of socio-economic status and other indicators, should be studied in greater detail.

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