

# Black medical students in US have heaviest debts, study finds

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This discrepancy may explain enrollment declines.

(HealthDay)—Black medical school students are more likely to be saddled with large education-related debts than students from other racial or ethnic groups, and this discrepancy may help explain the declining number of black students in American medical schools, a new study indicates.

Researchers analyzed data from more than 2,300 medical [students](#) at 111 U.S. medical schools in 2010 and 2011, and found that 62 percent of them anticipated having an education debt of more than \$150,000.

The proportion of black students who expected to have such a large amount of debt was about 77 percent, compared with 65 percent of whites, 57 percent of Hispanics and 50 percent of Asians, according to the study, which was published recently online in the journal *PLoS One*.

"The finding that black [medical students](#) had significantly higher anticipated debt than Asian students has implications for understanding differential enrollment among minority groups in U.S. medical schools," senior study author Dr. Sandro Galea, professor and chairman of the department of epidemiology at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, said in a university news release.

Since 2004, the number of black students in medical schools has fallen, while enrollment of Hispanic and Asian students continues to rise. In 2010 and 2011, the researchers said, 60 percent of medical-school students were white, 21 percent were Asian, 7 percent were Hispanic and 6 percent were black.

Compared with the overall U.S. population, the proportion of Asian students in medical schools is 75 percent higher, while the proportion of black students is more than 100 percent lower.

High medical-school debt can thwart efforts to have a diverse physician workforce that reflects the general population, the researchers said.

"Our work suggests that the burden of medical-student debt is substantial, and that the distribution of debt across race and ethnicity is disproportionate," Galea said. "With black students reporting higher debt burdens than their counterparts from other racial and ethnic backgrounds, it is plausible that this disproportionate [debt](#) burden may play a role in the relative decline in [medical school](#) attendance among [black students](#)."

**More information:** The American Medical Association has more about [medical school](#).

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