

Researchers to explore why some Americans are hit harder by heart disease and stroke

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As part of the American Heart Association's Strategically Focused Research Network focusing on Disparities in Heart Disease and Stroke, researchers from four institutions are exploring the differences that exist and improvements that need to be made when it comes to treating culturally diverse patients.

The Strategically Focused Research Network on Disparities in Heart Disease and Stroke will include investigators from the Medical University of South Carolina, Morehouse School of Medicine, Northwestern University and the University of Colorado-Denver, to look at heart disease and stroke in minorities.

Nearly half of all African-American adults have some form of [cardiovascular disease](#)—48 percent of women and 46 percent of men, according to the American Heart Association.

The association will support the network with an investment of \$15 million over four years.

"Some Americans do not have access to high-quality health care and they often suffer disproportionately from cardiovascular disease and stroke," said Steven Houser, Ph.D., chair of the AHA's research committee and director of the Cardiovascular Research Center at Temple University School of Medicine in Philadelphia. "In this network investigators will explore the bases of the disparities and work to identify solutions that improve the health of all Americans."

The Medical University of South Carolina will investigate why recovery from stroke in African-Americans is poor compared to whites. Scientists from several disciplines will use novel approaches like mapping brain connections to find better ways to reduce the impact of stroke, a leading cause of death worldwide.

Morehouse School of Medicine will look at resilience in black populations in the United States to find ways to reduce risk, disease and death. Because not all blacks have poor cardiovascular health, researchers say studying their resilience could be instrumental in understanding what works for those who are free of [heart disease](#), diabetes and high [blood pressure](#).

Northwestern University will examine how high levels of the protein FGF23 contribute to cardiovascular disease and study how a change in diet could prevent this. Researchers say that higher consumption of phosphates, an additive in cheap, processed foods, boosts the risk of [heart failure](#) and advanced chronic kidney disease in underserved populations. The goal is to find new heart failure treatments as well as opportunities for policy change in the food industry.

The University of Colorado will aim to improve blood pressure control in urban American-Indians and Alaska Natives by studying how racial discrimination could lead to an increased risk of cardiovascular disease. The belief that an individual has been the target of racism is linked to [high blood pressure](#), according to investigators. This may reduce patients' ability and desire to take medications and visit the doctor as needed.

The association has funded research networks for prevention and hypertension, and has announced the intent to fund networks focused on heart failure and women's health.

Provided by American Heart Association

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