

Wait time disparities increased for VA care during the pandemic

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Black and Hispanic veterans experienced greater access barriers to care

compared with their White counterparts during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to a study published online Jan. 23 in *JAMA Network Open*.

Deborah Gurewich, Ph.D., from the Veterans Affairs Boston Healthcare System, and colleagues assessed whether wait times increased differentially for Black and Hispanic versus White [veterans](#) from the pre-COVID-19 to the COVID-19 period. The analysis included [data](#) from 1.16 million veterans identified from the VA Corporate Data Warehouse for fiscal years 2019 to 2021 (Oct. 1, 2018, to Sept. 30, 2021).

The researchers observed significant wait time disparities for orthopedic services (e.g., Black veterans had wait times 2.09 days longer than White veterans) in the pre-COVID-19 period. There were no significant differences seen for cardiology services. There were increases in mean wait times observed from the pre-COVID-19 period to the COVID-19 period for both services among all three racial and [ethnic groups](#) (e.g., Hispanic wait times for cardiology services increased 5.09 days).

For Black veterans (4.10 days) and Hispanic veterans (4.40 days), wait time disparities increased significantly from the pre-COVID-19 period to the COVID-19 period compared with White veterans (3.75 days). During COVID-19, significant wait time disparities were still evident for orthopedic services (e.g., Hispanic veterans had [wait times](#) 1.98 days longer than White veterans), but not for cardiology services. Wait time ratios significantly varied across the 140 facilities, but only six facility wait time ratios were significant during the pre-COVID-19 period versus 26 during the COVID-19 period.

"Any wait time disparity is concerning, and it will be important for future work to monitor these trends, understand their sources, and implement appropriate interventions as needed," the authors write.

More information: Deborah Gurewich et al, Disparities in Wait Times for Care Among US Veterans by Race and Ethnicity, *JAMA Network Open* (2023). [DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2022.52061](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2022.52061)

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