

# Expert discusses ways to reduce health care disparities in Black and minority communities

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Credit: Mayo Clinic News Network

Health care disparities still persist in 2023. It's a problem that has plagued the U.S. for decades. A report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), shows Black people and other minorities have higher mortality rates in certain areas, including heart disease and cancer.

Dr. Kim Barbel Johnson, a Mayo Clinic family medicine physician, discusses ways patients and [health care professionals](#) can close the health equity gap.

"We all are aware that [health disparities](#), [health inequities](#), they have evolved over time," says Dr. Barbel Johnson.

## **Health care Inequalities statistics**

The statistics are startling. Non-Hispanic Black people have higher heart disease death rates than people of other racial and ethnic groups, according to the CDC. Research also shows that [health insurance coverage](#) has increased over time, but Hispanic adults are the most likely to lack health insurance and have an unmet need for medical care. Data also shows that Black people are more likely to die from cancer than any other group.

Health care disparities are complex for many reasons, including lack of access, historical injustices and implicit bias within the health care industry. Dr. Barbel Johnson says part of the solution is to empower patients.

"And that empowerment comes with education. It comes with access. It comes with timely intervention, access to timely intervention. It comes with education for prevention," she explains.

Dr. Barbel Johnson also calls on researchers and clinicians to be inclusive regarding trial studies.

## **Ways to improve health care disparities**

"We know that the data shows that racial and ethnic minorities haven't been present in many clinical trials in the clinical trial space," she says.

Dr. Barbel Johnson encourages patients to be proactive in reducing their chances of developing cancer and other chronic conditions by maintaining a healthy diet, exercising regularly, getting adequate sleep, and reducing tobacco and alcohol use.

"It's really important that we do everything that we can to treat the body and the mind and our spirit in as gracious a way as we can," she says.

Provided by Mayo Clinic

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