

Health Disparities in the Medicare Population: Asthma

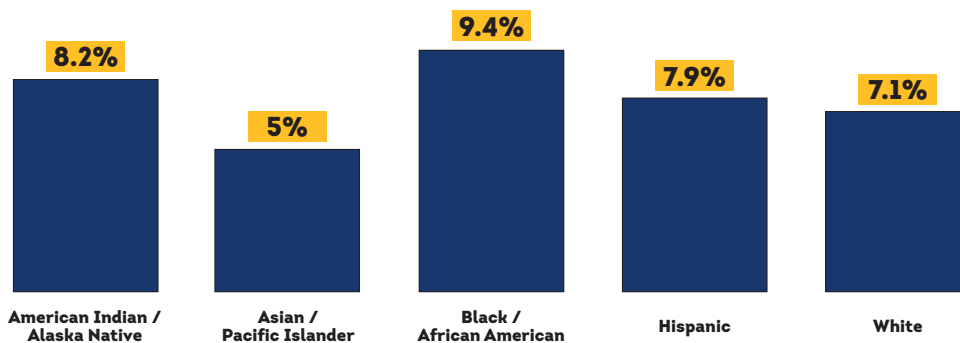
Asthma is a chronic lung disease that inflames and narrows the airways of the lungs resulting in recurring periods of wheezing, shortness of breath, chest tightening, and coughing. Causes are unknown, but individuals with a family history of asthma are more likely to be diagnosed. There is no cure for asthma, but physicians may prescribe inhalers, nebulizers, and other medications to control and manage asthma. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately 17.7 million adults in the U.S. are currently living with asthma.¹ Among U.S. adults, females account for approximately two-thirds of asthma deaths and rates of hospitalization and death due to asthma are three times higher in Blacks/African Americans than Whites.²



In 2014, 5.0% of all Medicare Fee-For-Service (FFS) beneficiaries, 7.6% of those under 65 years old, and 4.5% of those 65 years or older had claims with a diagnosis of asthma.³ Beneficiaries with both Medicare and Medicaid have a higher prevalence (8.3%) than those with Medicare only (4.2%). Among those under the age of 65, asthma is higher among females (10.9%) than males (4.6%). As shown in the figure below, the prevalence of asthma was highest among Black/African American beneficiaries (9.4%), followed by American Indian/Alaska Native (8.2%), Hispanic (7.9%), White (7.1%), and Asian/ Pacific Islander (5.0%) beneficiaries.

May is **National Asthma and Allergy Awareness Month** and the CDC has created an Asthma Awareness Month Toolkit that can be used to take control of and raise awareness about asthma. **Medicare Part B** covers nebulizers (and some medicines used in nebulizers if considered reasonable and necessary) as durable **medical equipment (DME)** that your doctor prescribes for use in your home.

Prevalence of Asthma among Medicare Beneficiaries less than 65 Years by Race/Ethnicity, 2014



Source: Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. Chronic Condition Data Warehouse (CCW)

Note: Population is limited to Medicare Fee-For-Service beneficiaries. RTI Race Code used for analysis. Racial categories of White, Black/African American, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Asian/Pacific Islander are classified as non-Hispanic. Hispanic ethnicity includes all race categories.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/asthma.htm>

² National Library of Medicine: National Institutes of Health. <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/health-pro/resources/lung/naci/discover/disparities.htm>

³ Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. Chronic Conditions.

<http://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/Statistics-Trends-and-Reports/Chronic-Conditions/index.html>