



December 1, 2022

Road Map Bulletin: Uncovering the Disparities in Diagnosis and Treatment of Depression

Happy Thursday, Mount Sinai Community—

This year, we've highlighted racial disparities in health care and outcomes, ranging from the [impact of the COVID-19 pandemic](#) to [maternal mortality](#), [prostate cancer](#), [heart health](#), and [glaucoma](#) treatment. Today, we want to look at health disparities from a different lens, moving away from our communities' physical health and instead exploring disparities in mental health.

According to the World Health Organization, depression is the leading cause of illness and disability worldwide—and the stress of the COVID-19 pandemic has [only increased](#) the prevalence of anxiety disorder and major depressive disorder. In fact, [according](#) to the National Center for Health Statistics, nearly 1-in-3 American adults have experienced symptoms of anxiety or depression during the pandemic, nearly triple the rate in 2019. This increase has magnified disparities in the diagnosis and subsequent treatment of depression that Black and Brown Americans face.

While depression affects all communities, research shows people of color in the United States are often hit the hardest.

One-third of Black adults with a mental health condition receive treatment and less than half of Hispanic Americans ages 18 to 25 who have serious mental health conditions receive treatment

According to a May 2022 [report](#), marginalized racial and ethnic communities — including Black and Hispanic Americans—are both more likely to experience severe and debilitating symptoms of depression and are less likely to receive treatment. Similarly, a survey by the federal government [found](#) that more Black and Hispanic Americans reported a moderate to severe impact from depression on their lives than white Americans.

Worryingly, experts from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) report that just one-third of Black adults with a mental health condition receive treatment and less than half of Hispanic Americans ages 18 to 25 who have serious mental health conditions receive treatment. And without adequate diagnosis and treatment, depression can lead to other [severe health issues](#) like chronic pain, self-harm, suicide, and morbidity due to undertreatment of chronic medical conditions.

This disparity is likely caused by a combination of factors—and that means we need a holistic approach to solving it.

As we have written about previously, patients of color may choose not to pursue treatment due to a mistrust of health systems based on uneven care provided to marginalized communities both [historically](#) and [more recently](#). Studies have also shown that patients [report better experiences](#) when they share the same racial or ethnic background as their clinician—however, there is a shortage of mental health providers of color, which may lead some patients to not seek treatment. Finally, a patient’s ability to pay and [lower rates of insurance coverage](#) in communities of color, may impact their decision to not pursue care.

While we know it’s a long journey ahead, here at Mount Sinai, our Road Map strategies are working to address these root causes—from integrating and unifying practices regardless of patients’ insurance status, to enhancing community partnerships to build trust, to increasing recruitment, hiring, and retention of staff members from under-represented minority groups.

We encourage those who desire to speak with counselors about this bulletin to contact our [Center for Stress, Resilience, and Personal Growth](#) or [other mental health resources](#).

As we continue this work, we invite you to join an event in the coming week: **“Chats for Change” is a production of the Icahn School of Medicine’s Racism and Bias Initiative.**

All the best,
Angela and Shawn

Join Us for an Upcoming Event

Chats for Change: From Slavery to Mass Incarceration: The Impact of the 13th Amendment — The 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution holds that “neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction”, but what does this mean for us today? Join us on December 13 as we explore the history of “post-slavery America” and the correlation between the ratification of the 13th Amendment and modern day mass incarceration. [Register on Zoom](#).

Road Map for Action

Past Bulletins
