

American Medical Association Probes America's Black Maternal Health Crisis

May 25, 2021 By Casey Halter

Black women are three to four times more likely than white women to die of [pregnancy](#)-related complications. The [American Medical Association](#) (AMA) called out this major public health disparity at a recent congressional committee meeting.

The AMA summarized the depth of the problem to the House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Reform, which assessed the issue at a hearing titled “Birthing While Black: Examining America’s Black Maternal Health Crisis.” The organization urged policymakers and providers to take steps to combat [discrimination and racism](#) within the health care system, which the AMA believes contributes to the crisis.

According to recent findings, nearly 700 women in the United States die each year due to pregnancy-related complications. In addition, annually, about 50,000 women experience possibly deadly difficulties from childbearing, with [maternal deaths](#) in the United States far surpassing those in other high-income countries. (The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that up to 60% of these deaths could be prevented.)

Studies also showed that, overall, heart disease and stroke were the predominant causes of pregnancy mortality across groups by race, ethnicity and age between 2011 and 2017. Among Black women, findings showed that preeclampsia, eclampsia and embolism were primary reasons for maternal deaths.

Additionally, inquiries also confirmed that [health inequities](#) exist regardless of educational and socioeconomic status. Black women with a college degree still face higher complication rates from pregnancy than women of other races, including those who never graduated from high school.

Experts say the reasons for the disparities are multifaceted. For example, evidence suggests that discrimination and racism affects the body and contributes to [negative health outcomes](#) across the board. In addition, chronic stress and trauma from discrimination—even prior to birth and during childhood—are linked with poor health and early death for Black women.

“The AMA recognizes racism—in its systemic, cultural, interpersonal and other forms—as a serious threat to public health, to the advancement of health equity and as a barrier to appropriate medical care,” the organization said in its statement to the committee.

AMA leadership agreed that more must be done to address the link between racism and discrimination and its effects on the health of Black women and their babies.

To learn more about maternal health disparities, see “[Racism May Place Black Mothers at a Higher Risk of Death.](#)”

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