Black Alaskans Face Higher Rates of Illness

Diversity among health care providers may help combat disparities among Black Alaskans.

July 14, 2022 By Laura Schmidt

A new study found that Black Alaskans face health disparities in the form of higher rates of certain types of cancer, kidney failure, infant and maternal mortality and more severe COVID-19 illness compared with Alaskans of other races.

Published by the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) School of Social Work, the report surveyed about 700 Black Alaskans and examined data gathered via focus groups and from publicly available federal and state health data. The Alaska Black Caucus, a community-based advocacy group, initiated the report to identify areas of improvement regarding the health of Alaska's Black residents, for whom scant data are available.

The report is the first to specifically zero in on Black Alaskans, according to Celeste Hodge Growden, president of caucus.

The survey identified higher rates of certain health issues such as cancer, specifically of the female reproductive system. What's more, many Black Alaskans reported experiencing discrimination at the hands of medical professionals, noting that doctors or nurses made inaccurate assumptions, were dismissive of their health concerns and seemed biased in making certain care decisions.

Ty Roberts, an Anchorage-based doula, said representation in health care is empowering and validating, especially for many of the Black women with whom she works.

"I always get the comment, 'I didn't know there was somebody like me out there who could help me,'" Roberts said in an Anchorage Daily News article. "And so now I'm realizing how much representation does matter, just to be in a place where there aren't implicit biases."

The report also found that although Black Alaskans are 20 times more likely to experience psychological distress, they are 50% less likely to receive mental health treatment or counseling.

"We want to understand not only the needs but also the strengths," Amana Mbise, an assistant professor at the UAA School of Social Work, said.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/black-alaskans-face-higher-rates-illness