Racial Cancer-Death Disparities Take a Huge Economic Toll on Blacks

Reducing cancer-related death rates among Black people to those of white people would save $3.2 billion in annual lost earnings.

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If the considerable excess number of years of life that African Americans lose to cancer compared with whites were reduced to make the rates comparable between the two racial groups, this would save the Black community $3.2 billion in lost earnings in a single year.

Investigators led by Jingxuan Zhao, MPH, of the American Cancer Society, and colleagues reached this conclusion by analyzing the cumulative number of years of life lost due to premature cancer deaths according to race.

The study authors, who published their findings in Cancer Spectrum, also factored into their analysis the annual median earnings, standardized by age, among different racial groups.

The analysis included the cumulative years of life lost and lost earnings for those 16 to 84 years old who were white, Black, Asian or Pacific Islander and Latino.

In 2015, the age-standardized lost earnings per 100,000 people in this age range who died of cancer were $34.9 million for whites, $43.5 million for Blacks, $22.2 million for Asians or Pacific Islanders and $24.5 million for Latinos.

In 13 of the 19 studies included in the new analysis, Blacks had a higher number of age-standardized cumulative years of life lost and lost earning rates compared with whites.

If the age-specific cumulative years of life lost and lost earning rates among African Americans were reduced such that they were comparable to those for whites, this would save the Black community $3.2 billion in lost earnings in 2015, the study authors estimated. That amounts to 22.6% of the total earnings lost to cancer during that year.

“Improving equal access to effective cancer prevention, screening and treatment will be important in reducing the disproportional economic burden associated with racial/ethnic disparities,” the study authors concluded.

To read the study abstract, click here.

To read a press release about the study, click here.

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