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AFRICAN AMERICANS IN IOWA

A Snapshot of Health Disparity Issues

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AFRICAN AMERICANS IN IOWA

African Americans have been in Iowa since before the first census in 1850, but were less than 1% of the population until 1970. Currently they make up 2.2% of the population. While slavery was never permitted in Iowa, institutional racism was law. In 1844 the constitutional convention unsuccessfully tried to keep Blacks from being or becoming state residents. The constitution of 1857 gave Blacks property rights and legal standing in courts, but deprived them of the rights to vote, sit on juries, and be members of the General Assembly. However, in 1868, not only did Iowa start admitting African Americans to public schools but also became one of only five states to give Blacks the vote (seventeen states refused). Between 1960 and 1990 discrimination in schools and employment was reduced through anti-discrimination laws and Black activism. However, housing discrimination still exists.¹

GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION

Since most of their employment opportunities were limited to railroads, mining, packing-houses and factories African Americans settled in urban areas.² Today 89% of Blacks in Iowa still live in urban areas. The cities with the greatest percentages of the African American population are Des Moines (29% of African Americans) and Waterloo (16% of African Americans). Significant African American populations are also in Davenport/Bettendorf (16%), Cedar Rapids (8%), Iowa City (5%), Sioux City (3%), Burlington (2%), Ames (2%), Fort Dodge (2%), Fort Madison (2%), and Clinton (2%).³

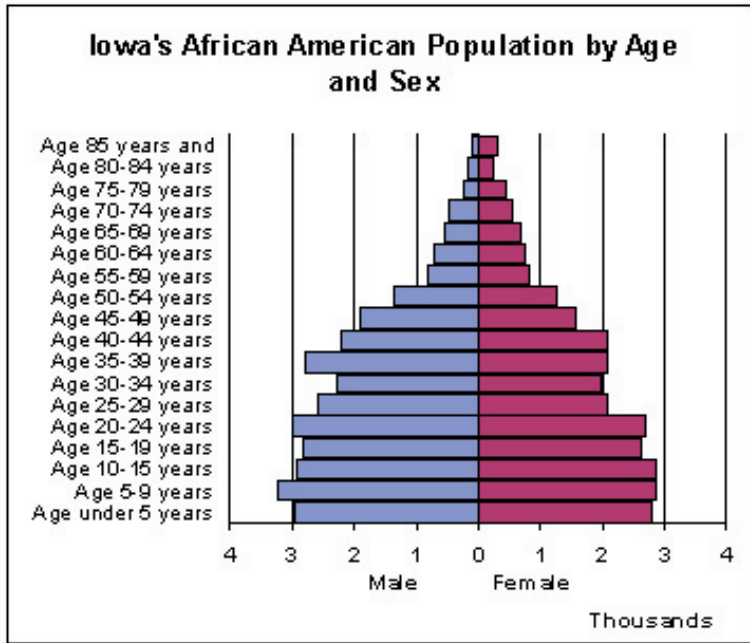


Figure 1: Iowa's African American Population⁴

In 2001 there were 72,512 African Americans in Iowa making them the second largest minority group after Latinos (82,473)⁵. This is a significant change from the 1990 Census in which Blacks were the largest minority group in Iowa. Of Blacks 9% are above 60 years of age and 39% are under the age of 20. Their median age is 25.3 and their average family size is 3.33.⁶ In 2001 their live birth rate per 1000 population was 17.7⁷ with a life expectancy of 72.2 years.⁸

In comparison, the White population is the majority population in Iowa making up 95% of residents⁹. While 27% of White Iowans are under 20 years, 20% are over 60, and the White life expectancy is 77.7 years of age.^{10 11} The average family size is 2.97 and the live birth rate is 12.7 per 1000 population.

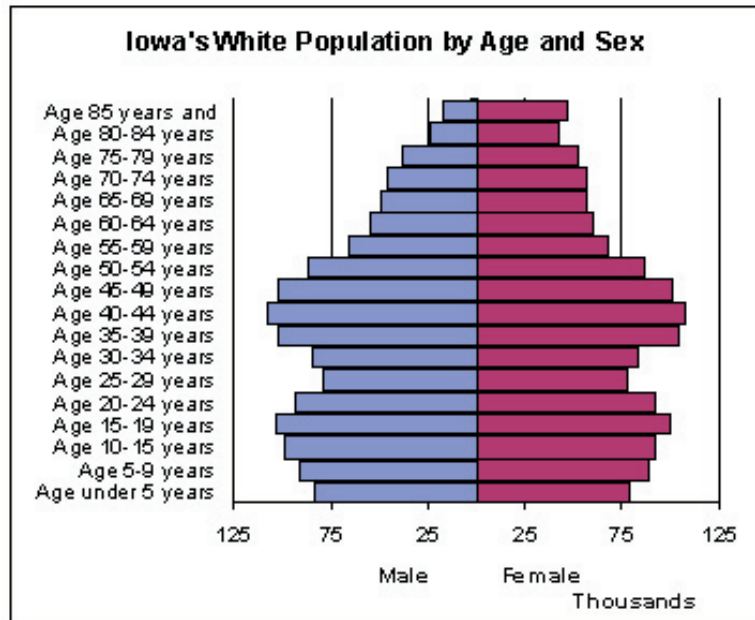


Figure 2: Iowa's White Population¹²

Household Income in 1999	Black	White
Less than \$10,000	22%	8%
\$10,000 to \$19,999	18%	13%
\$20,000 to \$29,999	17%	15%
\$30,000 to \$39,999	11%	14%
\$40,000 to \$49,999	10%	12%
\$50,000 to \$59,999	6%	10%
\$60,000 to \$74,999	7%	11%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	5%	9%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	3%	5%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	1%	1%
\$200,000 or more	1%	1% ¹³

African Americans earn nearly 40% less per capita than Whites.¹⁴

In 1999 per capita income for Blacks was \$12,400, while for Whites it was \$20,249.

In 1999 African Americans were four times as likely to live below the poverty level as Whites.

27% of Black families lived in poverty in 1999.

Only 8.1% of White families lived in poverty in 1999.

70% of African American families in poverty have single women as the head of the household.¹⁵

Iowa Poverty Status by Age -1999	White Alone Not Hispanic or Latino	Black or African American
Income in 1999 below poverty level:		
Under 5 years	1%	5%
5 years	0%	1%
6 to 11 years	1%	5%
12 to 17 years	1%	4%
18 to 64 years	5%	16%
65 to 74 years	0%	1%
75 years and over	1%	0%
Total Population	8%	32% ¹⁶

Educational Attainment for Population 25 Years and Older	Black or African American Alone	White Alone Non-Hispanic
Less than 9th grade	7%	5%
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	16%	8%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	31%	37%
Some college, no degree	25%	22%
Associate degree	6%	8%
Bachelor’s degree	10%	15%
Graduate or professional degree	5%	6% ¹⁷

African American Iowans tend to have lower education levels than Whites. Lack of education impacts every area of a person’s life from earning ability to birthrates and life expectancy. Literacy is one of the strongest, most direct predictors of health status and poverty.¹⁸

HEALTH DISPARITIES

As a group, the health status of African Americans is among the worst in the nation, with significantly higher morbidity and mortality rates for almost all diseases and injuries. Some of these figures are due to genetic factors, but most are a result of higher poverty and unemployment levels, lower education and literacy levels, institutional racism, more single-parent families, limited financial and cultural access to health care, and lifestyle factors. Blatant as well as more subtle forms of discrimination likely contribute to higher levels of stress among African Americans, which can negatively affect their health status as it relates to hypertension, low birth weight, headaches, and other conditions.¹⁹

As evidenced in the 2001 Vital Statistics of Iowa, there are a number of significant health disparities between the African American and White populations.

Blacks have an occurrence nearly twice that of Whites for low birth weight babies, fetal deaths, infant deaths, and deaths from heart disease.

Neonatal deaths (death of live born infant occurring within the first 27 days of life) among Blacks occur at more than 3 times the rate of Whites.

The Black population has a higher rate of diabetes.

75% of children born to African American women in Iowa are born out of wedlock.²⁰

African American women are nearly 2.5 times more likely to give birth under the age of 20 than White women.

Iowa Birth Events 2003	% of total African American Births	% of total White Births
Births out of wedlock	75%	29%
Mother under age 20	22%	8%
Low Birth Weight <2500 grams	13%	6%
Fetal Deaths	1%	1%
Infant Deaths	2%	0% ²¹

IOWA-Leading Causes of Death 2003	Blacks	Whites
Major Cardiovascular Diseases	34%	39%
Cancers	23%	23%
Unintentional Injuries	5%	4%
Chronic Lower Respiratory Diseases	4%	6%
Other Infective and Parasitic Diseases	3%	1%
Diabetes Mellitus	3%	3%
Pneumonia	3%	4%
Symptoms, Signs & Abnormal Findings, Not Elsewhere Classified	2%	1%
Homicide & Legal Intervention	2%	0%
Alzheimer's Disease	2%	3%
Suicides	2%	1%
Congenital Malformations, Deformations and Chromosomal Abnormalities	1%	0% ²²

BARRIERS TO HEALTH CARE

African Americans are much less likely to access health care in a timely manner in Iowa and the United States. They often enter the system when their medical conditions are more complicated and pronounced. Early intervention programs are best provided on an outreach basis in schools, neighborhoods, churches, and other locations where African Americans already are, rather than waiting for them to seek care.

Because of cost, lack of insurance or being underinsured, lack of transportation, limited hourly access, and lack of information about the ins and outs of the health care system, Black patients will often seek treatment for health problems later than the majority white population and are more likely to present with multiple, more advanced conditions.

Many continue to value alternative and more natural types of healthcare. Just as there are multiple strategies that individual health providers can undertake, health organizations can also adopt a variety of deliberate strategies to become more culturally effective with minority and immigrant patients.

Most Blacks are much more likely than Whites to take care of ill relatives and friends at home, rather than send them to formal providers or nursing homes.²³

AFRICAN AMERICANS

WORKING WITH

Create a welcoming environment. Make sure that all staff is trained in how to work effectively with immigrant and minority clients, in order to make their experience more positive.

Deliver health care services on-site: in churches, stores, community centers, schools, and work places.

Provide healthcare services at non-traditional hours including weekends and nights.

Make African Americans part of the health care community as members of your staff, hospital boards, non-profit advisory councils, and other decision-making entities.²⁴

Loss of Trust

Due to a historical legacy of slavery, institutional racism, legal segregation, unethical scientific experiments, racial profiling, and other human rights abuses over the past two centuries, lack of trust in the predominantly White American medical system is a factor in African Americans not seeking medical attention.²⁵

ENDNOTES

¹ *The African American Encyclopedia*, Second Edition. Michael W. Williams, editor.

² *Iowa's Black Legacy*. Charline J. Barnes and Floyd Bumpers. Arcadia Publishing, Great Britain, 1990.

³ SETA: Office of Social and Economic Trend Analysis. Iowa State University.

⁴ US Census Bureau, Census 2000.

⁵ Iowa Department of Public Health, Vital Statistics, 2001.

⁶ US Census Bureau, Census 2000.

⁷ Iowa Department of Public Health, Vital Statistics, 2001.

⁸ National Vital Statistics Reports, Vol.51, No. 3, December 19, 2002.

⁹ Iowa Department of Public Health, Vital Statistics, 2001.

¹⁰ US Census Bureau, Census 2000.

¹¹ National Vital Statistics Reports, Vol.51, No. 3, December 19, 2002.

¹² US Census Bureau, Census 2000.

¹³ United States Census Bureau, Census 2000, Summary File 3, Tables P151B & P151I

¹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵ *ibid*

¹⁶ United States Census Bureau, Census 2000 Summary File 3 Tables P159I and P159B

¹⁷ United States Census Bureau, Census 2000, Summary File 3 tables P148B and P148I

¹⁸ *A Health Providers Pocket Guide to Working with Immigrants, Refugees and Minority Populations in Iowa*. Michele Yehieli and Mark A. Grey, University of Northern Iowa Project EXPORT and New Iowans Program.

¹⁸ US Census Bureau, Census 2000.

¹⁹ Iowa Department of Public Health, Vital Statistics, 2001.

²⁰ *A Health Providers Pocket Guide to Working with Immigrants, Refugees and Minority Populations in Iowa*. Michele Yehieli and Mark A. Grey, University of Northern Iowa Project EXPORT and New Iowans Program.

²¹ Iowa Department of Public Health, Vital Statistics, 2003. Tables 4A and 4B

²² *ibid*

²³ *A Health Providers Pocket Guide to Working with Immigrants, Refugees and Minority Populations in Iowa*. Michele Yehieli and Mark A. Grey, University of Northern Iowa Project EXPORT and New Iowans Program.

²⁴ *ibid*

²⁵ *ibid*