



Fact Sheet: The State of African American Women in the United States

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African American women, who make up 13 percent of the female population in the United States,¹ are making significant strides in education, participation, health, and other areas, but there is a long way to go to fully close the racial and ethnic disparities they face. New policies such as the Affordable Care Act, or ACA, and other proposed policies such as paid sick leave can greatly improve the lives of African American women and their families. For example, under the ACA, around 5.1 million African American women with private health insurance are currently receiving expanded preventive service coverage² and an estimated 3 million African American women will gain access to affordable or subsidized health insurance.³

This fact sheet provides a snapshot of statistics about health, education, entrepreneurship, economic security, and political leadership that should guide our choices to enact sensible policies to unleash the potential of this growing demographic and benefit our economy.

Health

One in four African American women are uninsured.⁴ This lack of health insurance, along with other socioeconomic factors, continues to contribute to the dire health issues African American women face.

- Hypertension is more prevalent among African American women than any other group of women: 46 percent of African American women 20 years of age and older have hypertension, whereas only 31 percent of white women and 29 percent of Hispanic women in the same age bracket do.⁵
- While white women are more likely to have breast cancer, African American women have higher overall mortality rates from breast cancer.⁶ Every year, 1,722 African American women die from breast cancer—an average of five African American women per day.⁷

- Chlamydia and gonorrhea infection rates for African American women are 19 times higher than those of white women.⁸
- African American women have higher rates of human papillomavirus, or HPV, and cervical cancer, with mortality rates double those of white women.⁹
- African American women represent 65 percent of new AIDS diagnoses among women.¹⁰
- African American women experience unintended pregnancies at three times the rate of white women.¹¹
- Black women are four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes, such as embolism and pregnancy-related hypertension, than any other racial group.¹²
- Birth rates for teenage African American women from ages 15 to 19 decreased by 7 percent from 2011 to 2012.¹³
- African American women have the highest rates of premature births and are more likely to have infants with low or very low birth weights.¹⁴ African American infants are more than 2.4 times more likely as white infants to die in their first year of life.¹⁵
- Only 35 percent of African American lesbian and bisexual women have had a mammogram in the past two years, compared to 60 percent of white lesbian and bisexual women.¹⁶

Educational attainment

The level of educational attainment for African American women has risen very slowly and still sits at a significantly lower level than that of white women.

- The college graduation rate of African American women for the 2004 cohort was 24.1 percent and has not increased at the same rate as the graduation rates of white women, Latinas, or Asian American women.¹⁷
- Only 21.4 percent of African American women had a college degree or higher in 2010, compared to 30 percent of white women.¹⁸
- African American women held 8.58 percent of bachelor's degrees held by women in 2012 though they constituted 12.7 percent of the female population.¹⁹
- Only 2 percent of African American women are represented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, or STEM, fields,²⁰ while women in total make up 24 percent of the STEM workforce.²¹

- African American women earned more than half of all science and engineering degrees completed by African Americans—surpassing their male counterparts.²²
- According to Census data about work-life earnings, white women make more than African American women among full-time, year-round workers, regardless of what degrees they have obtained.²³

Entrepreneurship

African American women-owned businesses continue to grow despite significant financial and social obstacles.

- African American-owned businesses are the fastest-growing segment of the women-owned business market and are starting up at a rate six times higher than the national average.²⁴
- The number of companies started by African American women grew nearly 258 percent from 1997 to 2013.²⁵
- The number of African American women-owned businesses in 2013 was estimated at 1.1 million, comprising 42 percent of businesses owned by women of color and 49 percent of all African American-owned businesses.²⁶
- African American women-owned businesses employed 272,000 workers and generated \$44.9 billion in revenue in 2013.²⁷
- Of the top 10 fastest-growing private companies owned by black entrepreneurs from 2009 to 2012, only 27 percent were owned by black women.²⁸

Economic security

African American women continue to have higher rates of unemployment than white women and continue to have lower amounts of weekly usual earnings and median wealth compared to their male counterparts and white women. These disparities leave a growing portion of our population more vulnerable to poverty and its implications.

- The most current available data show that African American women only made 64 cents to the dollar compared to white, non-Hispanic men in 2010.²⁹ White women made 78.1 cents to the same dollar.³⁰

- A study by the American Association of University Women found that African American women made 90 percent of their African American male counterparts' wages in 2012.³¹
- African American women only earned \$610 per week, whereas African American men made \$666 and white women's median usual weekly earnings were \$718 in the second quarter of 2013.³²
- The unemployment rate of African American women more than 20 years of age increased above 2012 averages and was 181 percent more than that of white women in the second quarter of 2013. African American women had an unemployment rate of 10.5 percent compared to 5.8 percent for white women.³³
- Annual averages for 2012 show that 28 percent of African American women were employed in the service industry as opposed to only 20 percent of white women.³⁴
- Household data from 2012 found that only 11.9 percent of African American women were in management, business, and financial operations positions.³⁵ In comparison, women as a whole are employed in these fields at a rate of 41.6 percent.³⁶
- Married or cohabiting African American households have a median wealth of \$31,500 while single African American women have a median wealth of only \$100. African American women with children, however, have zero median wealth.³⁷
- African American women more than doubled their share of workers earning the minimum wage or below from 2007 to 2012.³⁸
- Among African American households, more than half—53.3 percent—of working wives were breadwinners.³⁹
- The poverty rate for African American women is 28.6 percent.¹³ In comparison, the poverty rate of white, non-Hispanic women is 10.8 percent.⁴⁰
- The poverty rate of African American lesbian couples is 21.1 percent versus 4.3 percent for white lesbian couples.⁴¹
- African American women are three times more likely than white women to be incarcerated. The American Civil Liberties Union, or ACLU, asserted in 2011 that incarceration particularly affects Latinas and black women as they are often the primary caregivers for their children and are also disproportionately victimized.⁴²

Political leadership

While African American women have a rich history of leadership in their communities, they are underrepresented in all levels of government.

- Of the 98 women in Congress, only 14 are African American women.⁴³
- Former Sen. Carol Moseley Braun (D-IL), an African American who served from 1993 to 1999, was the first of only two women of color to ever serve in the Senate.⁴⁴
- Of the 29 women of color currently serving in the House of Representatives, 16 are African American women.⁴⁵
- In the nation's 100 largest cities, only one African American woman is currently serving as mayor—Stephanie Rawlings-Blake of Baltimore.⁴⁶
- Currently, 242 African American women serve in state legislatures nationwide, comprising only 13.5 percent of the total population of women state legislators nationwide.⁴⁷
- Only 2 out of 73 women serving in statewide elective executive offices are African American women.⁴⁸
- State Rep. Karen Bass (D-CA) became the first African American woman to serve as speaker of a state house in 2008.⁴⁹

Endnotes

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