



Racial Disparities in Pregnancy Outcomes

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INTRODUCTION

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) serves a Veteran population that is increasingly racially and ethnically diverse. Equitable access to high-quality care for all Veterans is a core value of the VA healthcare mission. The Office of Health Equity (OHE) champions the elimination of health disparities and achieving health equity for all Veterans, including ensuring that pregnant Veterans receive the prenatal care they need.

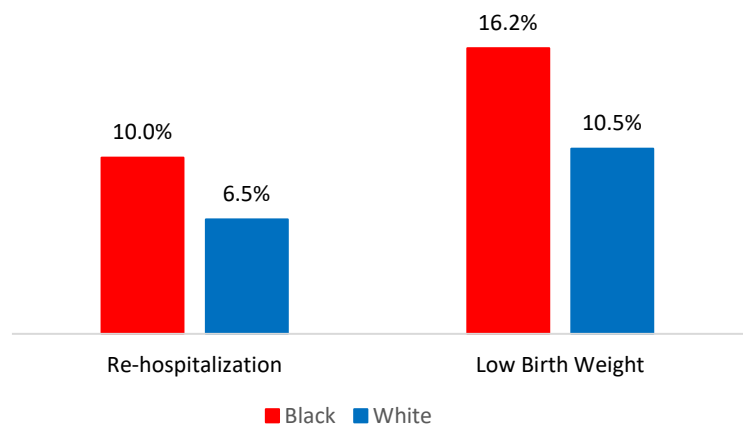
PREGNANCY OUTCOMES FOR BLACK AND WHITE VETERANS

VA pregnancy benefits cover prenatal, birth, and postpartum care. Use of these benefits has increased approximately 14-fold between 2000 and 2015. Nearly all pregnancy-related medical care provided to Veterans is purchased by VA from non-VA community providers.

Approximately 25% of pregnant Veterans receiving pregnancy-related care in the community and paid for by the VA are Black compared to 15% of births in the general population. Among 4,000 Veterans who used VA pregnancy benefits between June 2018 and December 2019, Veterans did not experience any racial disparities in accessing prenatal care. However, there were racial

disparities in postpartum hospitalization and infants who had low birth weight. Compared with white Veterans, Black Veterans had a higher prevalence of low birth weight and postpartum hospitalization (see graph). These racial disparities persisted even after adjustment for age, the number of babies a pregnant person may have had previously, and whether someone lived in a rural or urban area. Given the lack of racial disparities in access to prenatal care, the disparities in outcomes that pregnant Veterans are experiencing are likely related to other factors, such as social determinants of health (SDOH).

Racial Disparities in Veteran Pregnancy Outcomes, 2018-2019



**Data are unadjusted*
From Katon JG, et al., 2023

VA MATERNITY CARE COORDINATION AND ASSISTANCE

VA provides two national programs to assist Veterans with their maternity care needs and to improve maternal and infant health outcomes.

VA Maternity Care Coordinators

Maternity Care Coordinators (MCC) help Veterans navigate reproductive health care services they receive inside and outside of VA. MCCs also help Veterans access care for physical and mental health, connect to community resources, cope with pregnancy loss, connect to care after delivery, and answer questions about billing. Every VA Medical Center offers maternity care coordination. VA also covers nursing bras, nursing pads, breast/chest pumps, and maternity belts. MCCs can help pregnant Veterans access these supplies beginning at least two weeks prior to their due date.

Women Veterans Call Center

VHA has implemented the Women Veterans Call Center (WVCC) to address the social determinants

of health (SDOH) that impact maternal and infant health outcomes. The WVCC assists women Veterans navigate their health care at VA by helping to connect women Veterans with their local Women's Health clinic, determining eligibility for VA benefits, and refill a prescription or make an appointment. The WVCC is free and confidential. Women Veterans can call the WVCC as many times as they need. Calls are answered by women, some of whom are Veterans themselves.



For more information on Maternity Care Coordinators and Women Veterans Call Center and how to contact them, visit <https://www.womenshealth.va.gov>.

A VA Pregnancy and Maternity Care Research Snapshot can be found here:

https://www.hsrd.research.va.gov/centers/womens_health/Pregnancy-Maternity-Care-Research-Snapshot2023.pdf.

For more information about the Office of Health Equity visit: <https://www.va.gov/healthequity/>

References

1. Katon J et al. Gestational diabetes and hypertensive disorders of pregnancy among women Veterans deployed in service of operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. *J Women's Health*. 2014.
2. Katon JG, Bossick A, Tartaglione E, Enquobarie D, Haeger KO, Johnson A, Ma EW, Savitz D, Shaw JG, Todd-Stenberg J, Yano E, Washington DL, Christy A. Assessing Racial Disparities in Access, Use, and Outcomes for Pregnant and Postpartum Veterans and their Infants in VA. *Journal of Women's Health*. Accepted March 2023