



CHRONIC KIDNEY DISEASE AND DIALYSIS IN VETERANS

INFORMATION BRIEF

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INTRODUCTION

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) serves a Veteran population that is increasingly diverse. The Office of Health Equity (OHE) champions the elimination of health disparities for all Veterans. This brief discusses challenges and solutions to disparities in Veterans with kidney failure—one of the fastest growing and costliest segments of the veteran population.

KIDNEY DISEASE DISPARITIES

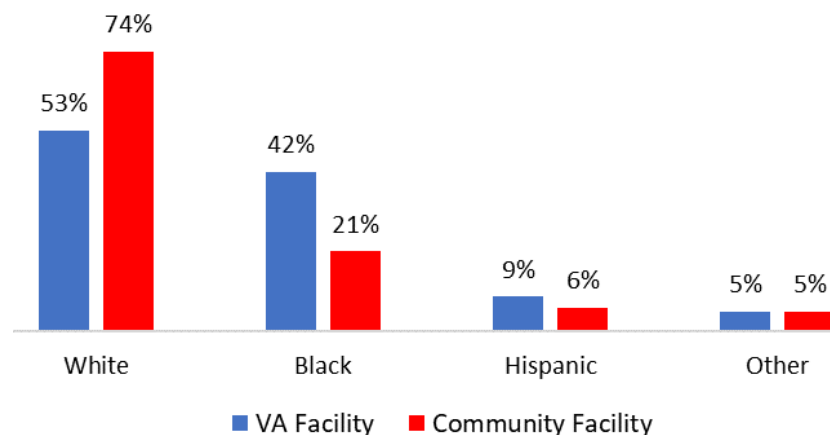
Each year, nearly 13,000 Veterans develop kidney failure – a condition with a variety of different treatment strategies: kidney transplant, home dialysis, in-center dialysis, or conservative kidney management. Most Veterans have the option to either receive dialysis at one of the 71 VHA dialysis centers or be referred to a dialysis center in the community.

Although kidney transplantation and home dialysis can offer better clinical outcomes at lower costs, over 90% of Veterans who develop kidney failure receive in-center hemodialysis - a treatment that requires Veterans to travel three times per week to a dialysis center for appointments that can last 3-4 hours at a time.

There are several benefits to home dialysis over in-center hemodialysis. Home dialysis is associated with better quality of life, doesn’t require as much travel, and is less costly. While a minority of VA Medical Centers offer home dialysis services (n=34), most rely on contracts with community nephrologists to provide this service.

Compared to Veterans who receive dialysis in the community, Veterans who receive dialysis within VHA are more likely to be Black or Hispanic, service connected, have a lower income, and live further from their dialysis provider. They are also more likely to have post-traumatic stress disorder or a history of homelessness.

Racial and Ethnic Differences in Veterans Receiving Dialysis Care, by Location



PREVENTING KIDNEY FAILURE

Strategies to slow disease progression and prevent or increase the time before the development of kidney failure are the cornerstone of caring for Veterans with kidney disease. A novel kidney disease education program: Healthier Kidneys Through Your Kitchen: Earlier Nutrition Intervention for Chronic Kidney Disease was developed by VHA Registered Dietitians (RDs) and is available at 14 VA clinics.

This program is aimed at Veterans who have Stage 3 kidney disease for whom lifestyle modification has the greatest potential to meaningfully slow progression of kidney disease and prevent or delay onset of kidney failure (Stage 5). This program provides evidence-based nutrition information and kidney disease education to help slow the progression of kidney disease. This class explains the stages of chronic kidney disease (CKD) and provides nutrition and physical activity guidance that can help slow the progression of CKD. Veterans learn about monitoring dietary protein

and sodium, about the importance of blood pressure and glucose control, and monitoring weight and waist circumference. Participants enjoy a Healthy Teaching Kitchen demonstration where RDs prepare recipes that participants can try during class. Veterans are also encouraged to meet with the RD for ongoing medical nutrition therapy that can help provide them with long term support in making lifestyle changes to maintain their kidney function.



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

References

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