



Black History Month: COPD and the Health of Black Communities

Advocating for Improved COPD Care

Reducing the COPD burden in Black communities requires strong partnership across public health, clinical care and community leadership. When people have access to early screening, clear information and consistent support, outcomes improve.

Meeting this challenge will require focused national and local leadership through:



Awareness and engagement:

Increase funding for COPD prevention, early detection and outreach in Black communities, while reducing barriers to guideline-recommended treatment and care.



Investment in community-focused solutions:

Strengthen culturally responsive education and support programs that help people navigate COPD care and manage their health.



Policy alignment:

Support and advance initiatives that reflect the goals of the COPD National Action Plan, including access to screening and diagnosis.



Accountability for progress:

Establish and track metrics to evaluate how national and local COPD initiatives impact outcomes in Black communities.

With coordinated national and local action, stronger investment in education and real accountability, better lung health in Black communities is possible.

Understanding the Facts



COPD Disproportionately Affects Black Americans

COPD is a leading cause of illness and death in the United States.

Black Americans often experience COPD differently. Studies show Black adults are more likely to have undiagnosed COPD, even when lung function testing shows impairment. Some research also finds Black patients may develop COPD at younger ages or with less exposure to smoking. These trends reflect exposure risk, social conditions, health care access and inequities beyond individual behavior.



Risk Factors Shaped by Environment and Inequity

Black communities are more likely to face long-term exposure to secondhand smoke, air pollution, workplace irritants and poor-quality housing. These exposures increase the risk of airway damage and respiratory illness.

Key contributors include:



Asthma prevalence and asthma-COPD overlap, which can blur symptoms and complicate diagnosis.



Higher cumulative exposure to environmental and occupational respiratory irritants.



Barriers to primary care and access to appropriate treatments.



The Weight of Multiple Health Conditions

Many people with COPD also live with other comorbidities like heart disease, diabetes, anxiety or depression. These conditions can increase hospitalization risk and reduce quality of life. Because Black Americans already face higher rates of several chronic illnesses, COPD can add to the health and financial burden for patients, families and caregivers.

