

Study: Black Americans Live Longer When There Are More Black Doctors In The County

Time and again, it has been stressed that representation matters. Studies have shown it matters in education. It matters in the judicial system. And a new study shows it matters in the medical field. Yet, only about 5.7 percent of doctors in the U.S. identify as Black or African American, according to the latest data from the Association of American Medical Colleges, [CNN](#) reported earlier the year.

A [study](#) published recently in Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) Network Open revealed that more Black doctors in a county lead to longer life expectancy and lower mortality in Black populations.

“That a single Black physician in a county can have an impact on an entire population’s mortality, it’s stunningly overwhelming,” Monica Peek, a primary care physician and health equity researcher at UChicago Medicine wrote a JAMA [editorial](#) accompanying the study. “It validates what people in health equity have been saying about all the ways Black physicians are important, but to see the impact at the population level is astonishing.”

The study is entitled “Black Representation in the Primary Care Physician Workforce and Its Association With Population Life Expectancy and Mortality Rates in the U.S.”

The researchers found [life expectancy](#) increased by about one month for every 10 percent increase in Black primary care physicians, [STAT](#) reported.

“That gap between Black and white mortality is not changing,” said John Snyder, a physician who was one of the lead authors. “Arguably we’ve found a path forward for closing those disparities.”



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The study didn't examine the reason Black people fare better in counties with more Black physicians, but earlier research showed "culturally concordant" medical care is of better and higher quality for patients. The study found that increases in life expectancy were greatest in counties with the highest rates of poverty.

"These findings should serve as a wake-up call for health care leaders and policymakers," Lisa Cooper, a primary care physician who directs the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Equity and has written widely on factors that may explain why [Black patients fare better under the care of Black doctors](#), told STAT.

The team of researchers were from the Health Resources and Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the

Association of American Medical Colleges. They analyzed the representation of Black primary care physicians within the country's more than 3,000 counties during 2009, 2014, and 2019.

Shockingly, the study found that just over half of the nation's counties had to be excluded from analysis because they contained not a single Black primary care physician.

The rate of Black representation among primary care physicians has risen since 2009, [HCP Live](#) reported.

According to the Department of Health and Human Services, Black primary care physicians were operating in more than 1300 U.S. counties in 2019—a 9.8 percent increase from just 10 years prior.

Additionally, other studies have shown that when Black patients are treated by Black doctors, they are [more satisfied with their health care](#), more likely to have [received the preventive care](#) they needed, and are [more likely to agree to recommended preventive care](#) such as blood tests and flu shots, STAT reported.