



# Executive Summary

JANUARY 2022

## In Their Own Words: Black Californians on Racism and Health Care

California, home to the most culturally diverse population in the country and the fifth-largest Black population of any state, has a major opportunity to be a leader in health equity. But glaring racial and ethnic inequities pervade its health care system, from insufficient access to worse health outcomes to excess mortality. Black residents have the shortest life expectancy (75 years) at birth of any racial/ethnic group, six years shorter than the state average. Black Californians have the highest death rates from breast, cervical, colorectal, lung, and prostate cancers. Black birthing people experience the highest rates of prenatal and postpartum depression, preterm births, low birthweight births, and pregnancy-related mortality. And Black infants have the highest mortality rates.<sup>1</sup>

As part of its commitment to ending health inequities, CHCF is funding *Listening to Black Californians*, a three-phase qualitative and quantitative study to understand the health and health care experiences of Black Californians. This project will also explore the impact of racism on Black Californians' experiences in the health care system, as well as the detrimental effects of racism on their health.

EVITARUS, a Black-owned public opinion research firm in Los Angeles, is conducting the research. An advisory group composed of academics, policymakers, providers, and community advocates is guiding the study. *Listening to Black Californians* will identify policy actions and practice changes at the clinical, administrative, and training levels that policymakers

and health system leaders can take to eliminate discrimination in health care and to improve the health outcomes of Black Californians.

This report describes the results of Phase I of the *Listening to Black Californians* study, which was conducted during the summer of 2021. The 100 people interviewed for this phase explained how they think about health and described their individual experiences with California's health care system. While each

### About *Listening to Black Californians*

**PHASE I.** Individual, hour-long interviews with 100 Black Californians conducted from June to August 2021 to understand their views on health and well-being, their perceptions of discrimination and bias in the health care system, and their views on what a quality health care system looks like.

**PHASE II.** A series of 18 focus groups segmented by gender identity, sexual orientation, age, region, and health insurance status. Discussions focused on structural issues in the health care system.

**PHASE III.** A statewide survey of 3,000 Black Californians to assess the extent to which the Phases I and II findings are represented among the general Black Californian population. Report expected in summer 2022.

[www.chcf.org/program/listening-to-black-californians](http://www.chcf.org/program/listening-to-black-californians)

1. 2021 Edition – *Health Disparities by Race and Ethnicity in California: Pattern of Inequity*, California Health Care Foundation, October 2021.

interview provided unique insights, taken together, the conversations revealed many similarities in how Black Californians view health and how they experience health care. Interviewees shared their perceptions about health, their experiences with racism and health care, and their perspectives on what constitutes quality health care. The study results are summarized below.

### **Respondents held a holistic view of health and prioritized it in their everyday lives.**

- ▶ Respondents viewed health holistically, emphasizing the integration of physical, mental, and spiritual health.
- ▶ Improving health and maintaining good health were high priorities for respondents.
- ▶ Family health history and attitudes have shaped individual approaches to health.
- ▶ Many respondents felt that their communities made it difficult to be healthy.
- ▶ Insufficient personal resources sometimes made it challenging to maintain good health.

### **Experiences of racism in health care were widespread and negatively impacted participants' health.**

- ▶ Racism and discrimination have taken a toll on the health and well-being of respondents.
- ▶ Participants experienced racism in interactions with the health care system.
- ▶ Participants did not always attribute poor experiences in health care settings to racism or discrimination.
- ▶ Interviewees perceived discrimination based on health insurance coverage.
- ▶ Some respondents attributed negative experiences to the health care system's profit motive.
- ▶ Some participants reported avoiding care due to distrust of the health care system.

- ▶ Respondents have taken measures to prevent or mitigate negative experiences during health care appointments.

### **Participants envisioned high-quality health care as patient-centered and proactive.**

- ▶ Respondents described an ideal health care system that contrasted sharply with their own experiences.
- ▶ Respondents wanted health care providers who are respectful, engaged, and compassionate.
- ▶ Health care providers should be held accountable for negative interactions and poor outcomes.
- ▶ Many, although not all, respondents wanted access to Black physicians.
- ▶ Respondents suggested training health care providers in culturally and linguistically appropriate care.

*"As a Black person, I always have to ask the question: Did they just do that because I'm Black? Even if it's not true, it's always on my mind. And not every group has to even ask that question or second guess on that level. And that (affects) well-being and (contributes) to anxiety, and even (to) a situation that might cause someone to say, you know what, I'm not going into the doctor, because I don't feel like having another dismissive experience. And that could contribute to someone's poor health and even death because maybe something would have been detected on that visit."*

— 50-year-old Black male, San Francisco Bay Area

## About the Author

This report was written by Linda Cummings, PhD, health services research consultant. Research was designed, conducted, and analyzed by **EVITARUS**, a Black-owned public opinion research firm in Los Angeles. The interviews were conducted by a cohort of interviewers, led by Shakari Byerly, Managing Partner.

## About the Foundation

The California Health Care Foundation is dedicated to advancing meaningful, measurable improvements in the way the health care delivery system provides care to the people of California, particularly those with low incomes and those whose needs are not well served by the status quo. We work to ensure that people have access to the care they need, when they need it, at a price they can afford.

CHCF informs policymakers and industry leaders, invests in ideas and innovations, and connects with changemakers to create a more responsive, patient-centered health care system.