



# Executive Summary

OCTOBER 2022

## Listening to Black Californians: How the Health Care System Undermines Their Pursuit of Good Health

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, again and again, research has shown that racism and structural barriers in the health care system prevent Black Californians from achieving the health they actively seek.<sup>1</sup>

Long-standing racial and ethnic health disparities laid bare by the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with the powerful demonstrations against police violence catalyzed by the murder of George Floyd, prompted CHCF to investigate the relationship between racism and health care that leads to unacceptable health outcomes for Black Californians.<sup>2</sup> To identify solutions for dismantling persistent health inequities, CHCF engaged EVITARUS, a Black-owned public opinion research firm in Los Angeles, to conduct qualitative and quantitative research that listens deeply to Black Californians talking about their experiences with racism and health care.

*Listening to Black Californians* is one of the largest studies focused on the health care experiences of Black Californians to date. The qualitative phases, conducted from June to December 2021, included in-depth interviews with 100 Black Californians and 18 focus groups consisting of Black Californians and key health care stakeholders. The interviews and focus groups informed the content of a statewide survey, conducted from March to May 2022, and completed by 3,325 adult Black Californians recruited to reflect the population based on the 2020 US Census and 2019 American Community Survey.

### Key Findings

The *Listening to Black Californians* study found that many Black Californians share similar attitudes about health and similar experiences in the health care system. However, there are also important differences, as Black Californians are a diverse group. This report focuses primarily on the findings from the statewide survey, illuminating what Black Californians have in common about health and health care and where their attitudes and experiences diverge.

**Black Californians are highly intentional in their pursuit of physical and mental health.** Most Black Californians report putting a great deal or quite a bit of effort into getting appropriate screenings or preventive care (77%); tracking health indicators, such as blood pressure and cholesterol (71%); and working to reach or maintain a healthy weight (71%). A strong majority (79%) focus a great deal or quite a bit on their mental health.

**Most Black Californians are insured, have a regular provider, and have had at least one visit with a health care provider in the last year.** Nine in ten Black Californians (90%) say they currently have health insurance coverage, and 83% have a regular provider. Over 9 in 10 Black Californians (92%) have seen a doctor or health care provider in the last year.

**Nearly one in three Black Californians has been treated unfairly by a health care provider because of their race or ethnicity.** This experience is most common among Black Californians with mental health conditions (47%); those who identify as LGBTQIA+, which includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender,

queer or questioning, intersex, asexual, and more (43%); those with disabilities (40%); and women (40%). A significant number of Black Californians overall (38%) and of Black women in particular (47%), say there has been a time when a health care provider did not treat their pain adequately.

*“Based on the Listening to Black Californians survey results, Black people are actively engaged in their own health care advocacy, but this has not eliminated the systemic issues that result in poor health outcomes.”*

— Venise C. Curry, MD, *Listening to Black Californians* Advisory Group Member, Consultant, and Western Director, Climate Health and Equity Fellowship (Medical Consortium on Climate and Health)

**More than one in four Black Californians avoids care due to concerns that they will be treated unfairly or with disrespect.** Even higher numbers of Black Californians who identify as LGBTQIA+ (41%) and those enrolled in Medi-Cal (35%) report having avoided care.

**Many Black Californians adopt measures to mitigate potential negative experiences in preparation for a health care visit.** Two-thirds (66%) of Black Californians report researching a health condition or concern before meeting with a health care provider, and over one-third (35%) say they have tailored their speech and/or behavior to make a provider feel at ease.

**Black Californians agree on the importance of strengthening the patient-provider relationship.** Virtually all Black Californians consider it extremely important or very important to have a provider who listens to them (98%), who spends the time needed to answer questions (97%), and who discusses specific health goals (93%).

**Black Californians have clear opinions on how to make the health care system work better for them.** A strong majority of respondents believe it is extremely important or very important to:

- ▶ Increase Black representation among health care leadership (85%) and in the health care workforce (80%), as well as establish more Black-led, community-based clinics (80%).
- ▶ Expand community-based education on how to navigate the health care system and advocate for quality care (84%) and increase the number of Black community health care advocates (77%).
- ▶ Establish accountability for equitable care by implementing financial (82%) and accreditation (80%) incentives in the health care system, as well as through provider training (80%).
- ▶ Develop more holistic approaches to health care (73%) and expand access to non-Western and alternative medicine (69%).

*“I think by having more Black people represented in the health care profession and in those positions of power and able to make the changes that we need for us . . . will allow us to have our voices heard and our concerns addressed better in the health care system.”*

— Black man, focus group participant, Central Valley stakeholders

The diverse voices of participants speak loudly through *Listening to Black Californians*. They tell us that eliminating the detrimental effects of racism and discrimination on their health is within our grasp if we are willing to listen to Black Californians, build trust and partner with them, and hold the health care system accountable for equitable care.

## About the Author

This report was written by Linda Cummings, PhD, health services research consultant. The 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 Managing Partner Shakari Byerly.

## About the Foundation

The **California Health Care Foundation** (CHCF) 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.

## Endnotes

1. Megan Thomas and Allison Valentine, *2021 Edition – Health Disparities by Race and Ethnicity in California*, CHCF, October 22, 2021.
2. “**Advancing Black Health Equity**,” California Health Care Foundation (CHCF), accessed August 19, 2022.