



## Listening to Black Men in California

### Black Men Pursue Mental and Spiritual Well-Being

Three in four Black men say they devote “a great deal” or “quite a bit of effort” into reducing stress (78%) and focusing on their mental health (77%). Black men with Medi-Cal are more likely to devote “a great deal” or “quite a bit of effort” into reducing stress and focusing on their mental health than Black men with private coverage or Medicare.

Seven in 10 Black men with Medi-Cal (69%) say they put a “great deal” or “quite a bit of effort” into praying or some other spiritual activity, which is higher than Black men with private insurance (57%) ([Figure 1](#)).

Black men age 25 to 34 (85%) are more likely than men in any other age group to say they put “a great deal” or “quite a bit of effort” into focusing on their mental health. In comparison, 70% of respondents age 65 and older say they put “a great deal” or “quite a bit of effort” into focusing on their mental health.

### Black Men Are Actively Engaged in Their Physical Health

Nearly 9 in 10 of all Black men surveyed (88%) and 93% of Black men age 45+ had at least one health care visit in the past year.

### About the Study

In 2021 and 2022, Black-owned research firm EVITARUS conducted the *Listening to Black Californians* study for CHCF. [In 100 individual interviews,<sup>1</sup> 18 focus groups and a statewide survey of 3,325 adult Black Californians,<sup>2</sup>](#) participants described their attitudes toward their own health and their experiences with the health care system. This set of fact sheets highlights the health care experiences of specific groups within California’s Black population. This fact sheet was written by Rodrigo Byerly, MPA, president and CEO of EVITARUS.

### About the Participants: Black Men

This study included hour-long interviews with 49 Black men, four focus groups of Black men with 26 total participants, and 1,235 male survey respondents. This study is notable for the large number and diversity of Black men across California who participated in the qualitative and quantitative phases of the research.

Half (50%) of Black male survey respondents live in urban areas of the state, while 28% live in a suburban area, 13% in a small town, and 6% in a rural area. Nearly all Black male respondents (92%) have health insurance. Among those with insurance, 61% have private coverage, 19% have Medicare, and 16% have Medi-Cal. Thirty-eight percent of all Black men surveyed, and more than half of those age 35 to 54, live with children under age 18. See Appendix A on page 6 for a demographic breakdown of the Black male survey respondents.

The Black men surveyed report a high degree of personal or familial experience with physical and mental health conditions. More than half (54%) report that either they have or someone in their household has a serious physical health condition (such as high blood pressure, diabetes, or some other condition).<sup>3</sup> Three in 10 (31%) report that they have or someone in their household has a mental health condition (such as depression, anxiety, or some other condition).<sup>4</sup>

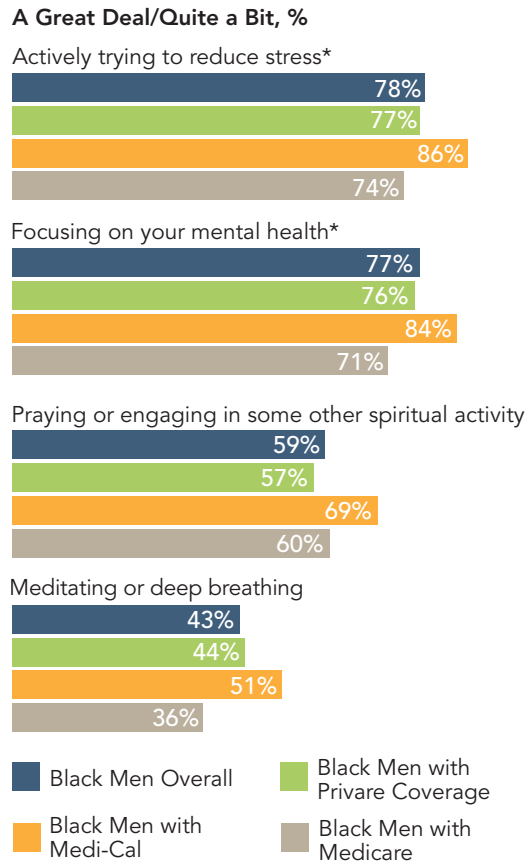
Eight in 10 Black men overall and more than 9 in 10 Black men age 45+ have a regular health care provider (Figure 2). Black men with Medi-Cal (77%) are less likely to have a regular provider than those with Medicare (94%) or private insurance (83%).

Eight in 10 Black men (81%) put “a great deal” or “quite a bit of effort” into speaking up about their concerns when they go to the doctor, even when their doctor does not ask. Seven in 10 Black men overall devote “a great deal” or “quite a bit” of effort to: getting appropriate screenings or preventive care; working to reach or maintain a healthy weight; and tracking indicators of personal health or symptoms (Figure 3).

In interviews and focus groups, some men described how their attitudes towards health changed when they became fathers and how they became much more focused on their own health as well as the health of their children.

**Figure 1. Things to Maintain or Improve Personal Mental Health, by Insurance Coverage**

Q: Here are things that some people do because they think that these things will help them maintain or improve their health. For each one, please tell me how much effort, if any, you put into doing it.



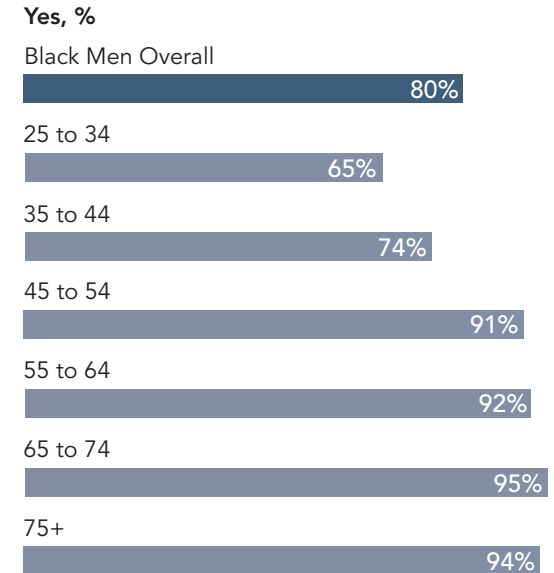
\*p<.05 for differences between Medi-Cal and private coverage and Medicare.

Note: Sample includes 1,235 Black California male residents age 18 and older.

Source: *Listening to Black Californians*, statewide survey conducted by EVITARUS (March 5-May 8, 2022).

**Figure 2. Regular Doctor or Health Care Provider, Black Men by Age**

Q: Do you have a regular doctor or health care provider that you see when you are sick, for routine check-ups, and/or care for a specific condition?



Notes: Sample includes 1,235 Black California male residents age 18 and older. p <.05 for differences between younger age groups (25-34; 35-44) and older age groups (45-54; 55-64; 65-74; 75+).

Source: *Listening to Black Californians*, statewide survey conducted by EVITARUS (March 5-May 8, 2022).

**Figure 3. Things to Maintain or Improve Health, Black Men Overall**

Q: Here are things that some people do because they think that these things will help them maintain or improve their health. For each one, please tell me how much effort, if any, you put into doing it.

**A Great Deal/Quite a Bit, %**

Speaking up about your concerns when you go to the doctor even when they do not ask

81%

Getting appropriate screenings or preventive care

74%

Working to reach or maintain a healthy weight

71%

Tracking indicators of personal health or symptoms, such as your blood pressure, blood sugar, cholesterol, sleep patterns, headaches, or any other indicators

70%

Exercising during your leisure time

61%

Taking vitamins or supplements

55%

Note: Sample includes 1,235 Black California male residents age 18 and older.

Source: *Listening to Black Californians*, statewide survey conducted by EVITARUS (March 5-May 8, 2022).

*"I think about my health a lot now that I'm a father. I didn't care about how I lived as a child and as a young adult. But as I became older, had children, a family, health is something that I worry about every day. My wife has COPD [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease] and diabetes, and congestive heart failure. So, I worry about her health as well. My kids have asthma from living in this dirty city. I got asthma myself. So, yeah, health is the biggest concern, one of the biggest concerns I have in my life because I want to live a long time."*

— 35-year-old Black Man, Central Valley

### **Black Men Are Health Advocates for Themselves and Their Families**

In interviews and focus groups, many Black men shared stories of advocating for themselves and their families. A man from Los Angeles described the active role he took to ensure that his wife would receive high-quality care during her pregnancy and labor, researching local hospitals and paying extra for access to a specific hospital with better outcomes for mothers and infants. Another man from the San Francisco Bay Area related that he attended all of his children's medical appointments and actively embraced his role as an advocate for their health.

A 59-year-old man from the Central Valley shared that he learned from a Black doctor at a young

age to advocate for himself, which has given him the confidence to ask questions and communicate effectively in interactions with people in the health care system. He shared that recently he was able to have a productive discussion with his doctor about changing medications. He also taught his children how to advocate for themselves in health care appointments — how to explain what they're feeling and how much pain they're experiencing.

*"I think if you have more people advocate and chaperone, volunteer, I think it will help bridge the communication. I was a client at a clinic, and I was volunteering and getting services, and it really helped people understand that I am a client, and I am struggling, but I'm also here for you guys. . . . Just to let them know that they are not alone."*

— Male Participant, Medi-Cal Insured Central Valley/Inland Empire Focus Group

### **Black Men Are Primary Caregivers for Family Members**

Many Black male participants shared their experiences serving as the primary caregiver for their children, partners, and aging parents. A 65-year-old man from the San Francisco Bay Area described taking care of his aging mother who has schizophrenia and the challenges of making sure she was safe while he was working.

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Similarly, a 34-year-old man from the Sacramento region shared that he had become the primary caregiver for his fiancé, who was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma cancer. He prepares her meals, administers her medications, bathes her, and drives her to appointments. During hospitalizations, he visits her often to make sure that she receives needed care, such as pain medication and personal hygiene, in a timely fashion.

*"My wife after the stroke has some short-term memory issues. . . . I take on all the cooking chores now. She can't drive right now. And so, I'm the primary care for her. . . . It's certain things that I'm committed to happen that she would do for me. . . . Being a care provider is not easy. . . . I realized that my spouse is not the same as she was fifty years ago. And one day, I may be not who I am today, she may be taking care of me. So, I'm committed to my wife and my family."*

— 75-year-old Black man, Sacramento/Far North

## Black Men Want Information and Opportunities to Share Knowledge

In their roles as advocates and caregivers, Black men in this study shared that they are eager for more information, guidance, and tools to help ensure better health care experiences for themselves and their family members. In one focus group, men discussed how to handle situations in

which doctors and health care staff discriminate against them, while at the same time advocating for their health.

In focus groups, Black men appreciated the opportunity to share their health care experiences with each other and to learn that they were not alone in these experiences. Many participants lamented the lack of similar opportunities to gather with other Black men and share knowledge about pursuing good health and positive care outcomes.

*"Getting out there and having those forums where it's in a comfortable atmosphere for questions, answers, what treatment should look like, what are expectations, how to advocate for yourself, what are some practices to be proactive in your own health. I remember going to a men's conference, and they had a physician come in. . . . It was so motivating to hear from someone who could identify with how you think, and some of your experiences. . . . He talked about health in a simplistic way, how to go about your own health."*

— 59-year-old Black man, Central Valley

## Key Areas for Action

Throughout the *Listening to Black Californians* study, Black men clearly communicated their strong interest in tending to and advocating for their own physical and mental health, as well as that of their family members. Health care providers, systems, and community organizations have an opportunity to partner with Black men to improve their health care experiences and those of their loved ones.

Specific actions include:

- ▶ **Offer and promote community-based forums for Black men to discuss health care issues and share information with each other.** Community-based organizations and traditional meeting places for Black men should be encouraged to host health-based forums for Black men. This could include partnering with community organizations that focus on working with, mentoring, and training Black men and boys, and tapping into mentorship networks for Black men.
- ▶ **Engage health care providers in building strong, trusting relationships with Black men.** Providers can build trust with Black men by actively listening, creating priorities for visits together, and considering the patient's circumstances and engagement in their health.

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- ▶ **Expand access to Black health advocates and medical chaperones.** Many Black men expressed an interest in having Black health advocates or chaperones accompany them to health appointments and/or be available to discuss treatment choices.
  - ▶ **Involve Black men in initial and ongoing training for health care providers and frontline staff.** Training should include normalizing the idea of Black men needing care in safe environments, as well as the idea of Black male caregivers accompanying family members to appointments. In addition, health systems and providers should work with Black men to improve their experiences throughout health care visits, from initial encounters at the registration desk to interactions with medical providers to appointment follow-up.

### THE TAKEAWAY

Black men in California are invested in their health and actively advocate for their own well-being and for the health of loved ones. Health care providers and community organizations should partner with Black men to pursue positive health outcomes through community forums and provider training.

### Endnotes

1. Linda Cummings, [\*In Their Own Words: Black Californians on Racism and Health Care\*](#), California Health Care Foundation (CHCF), January 2022.
2. Linda Cummings, [\*Listening to Black Californians: How the Health Care System Undermines Their Pursuit of Good Health\*](#), CHCF, October 2022.
3. Each survey respondent was asked: "Do you, or does anyone in your household, have a serious health condition such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, cancer, HIV, Multiple Sclerosis (MS), or some other condition?"
4. Each survey respondent was asked: "Do you, or does anyone in your household, have a mental health condition such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, dementia, Alzheimer's, or some other condition?"

**Appendix A. Demographics of Black Male Respondents (N = 1,235, 18+)**

	PARTICIPANTS (#)	PARTICIPANTS (%)
<b>SEXUAL ORIENTATION</b>		
Heterosexual/Straight	1,080	93%
Gay	85	3%
Bisexual	27	1%
Queer, Asexual, Pansexual, or Questioning	26	1%
<b>AGE</b>		
18 to 34	159	33%
35 to 44	205	17%
45 to 54	225	15%
55 to 64	288	18%
65+	351	17%
<b>REGION</b>		
Los Angeles County	512	36%
San Francisco Bay Area	222	17%
Inland Empire	150	17%
San Diego, Orange, and Imperial Counties	142	11%
Central Valley	80	9%
Sacramento and Surrounding Counties	96	6%
Central Coast	25	3%
Far North	8	1%

	PARTICIPANTS (#)	PARTICIPANTS (%)
<b>INSURANCE STATUS AND COVERAGE</b>		
Uninsured	75	7%
Employer-Provided	565	50%
Medi-Cal	174	16%
Medicare	199	18%
Privately Purchased	71	3%
Other	151	8%

Notes: Ns are unweighted. Percentages are weighted. "Prefer not to say" is not shown.