People of Color Face Greater Burden, Worse Lung Cancer Outcomes

American Lung Association's new report examines toll of lung cancer state-by-state, identifies opportunities to save lives with screening

November 19, 2020 By American Lung Association

'State of Lung Cancer' Report Finds People of Color Face Greater Burden, Worse Lung Cancer Outcomes

People of color diagnosed with lung cancer face worse outcomes compared to white Americans, according to the American Lung Association's 3rd annual "State of Lung Cancer" report.

While more people are surviving the disease than ever before, lung cancer remains the nation's leading cause of cancer death. The 2020 "State of Lung Cancer" report tracks the toll of lung cancer by state, and for the first time, this year's report explores the lung cancer burden among racial and ethnic groups at the national and state levels.

Contributing to the worse outcomes faced by people of color, the report finds that people of color who are diagnosed with lung cancer are less likely to be diagnosed early, less likely to receive surgical treatment, and more likely to receive no treatment. Lack of access to quality and affordable healthcare is a key part of worse outcomes.

"Lung cancer is often referred to as the silent killer, as it has few symptoms and is typically found in later stages when it's less curable," said American Lung Association President and CEO Harold Wimmer. "The American Lung Association has long worked to bring lung cancer out of the shadows, and to fully uncover the toll of lung cancer and save more lives. To accomplish this, we must also address the disproportionate burden faced by people of color."

More than 228,000 people in the U.S. will be diagnosed with lung cancer this year. The 2020 "State of Lung Cancer" report found the following promising overall national trends in survival rates, early diagnosis and treatment of the disease:

- Survival rate: While lung cancer remains the leading cause of cancer deaths, the lung cancer survival rate – the percentage of people alive five years after a lung cancer diagnosis – has

increased 13% over the last five years to 22.6% nationally. Survival rates were best in Connecticut (27.1%), Minnesota (26.9%), New Jersey and Rhode Island (both 25.9%), and worst in Alabama (17.1%), Mississippi (17.6%) and Louisiana (18.1%).

- Early diagnosis: Diagnosing the disease before it has spread is key to survival, as this is when the disease is most curable. The early diagnosis rate over the last five years has increased 33% to 22.9% nationally. Early diagnosis rates were best in Massachusetts (28.8%), Wyoming (28.6%), and Connecticut (27.2%), and worst in Hawaii (18.0%), Alaska (18.6%) and New Mexico (19.0%).
- Lung cancer screening: Screening improves early diagnosis – when the disease is most curable. While an estimated 8 million people are considered at high risk for lung cancer and are recommended for screening, only 5.7% of those eligible were screened in 2019. Screening rates were best in Massachusetts (18.5%), Vermont (13.8%), and New Hampshire (12.1%), and worst in New Mexico (1.6%), California (1.2%), and Nevada (1.0%).
- Treatment: Nearly one in six (15.2%) patients do not receive any type of treatment after being diagnosed with lung cancer. Lack of treatment rates were best in North Dakota (7.5%), Massachusetts (9.4%), and Missouri (9.5%), and worst in Arizona (29.5%), New Mexico (23.8%), and California (22.9%).

Despite these promising findings for the overall population, the report also highlighted health disparities for communities of color. For instance, early diagnosis rates were 16% lower among Black people and 13% lower among Latinos than the white population. The rate of surgical treatment was 19% lower for Black and Indigenous peoples (American Indians/Alaska Natives). The report also found Latinos had 39% higher rates of no treatment compared to white Americans.

“The ‘State of Lung Cancer’ highlights that too many people are being left behind when it comes to making progress against lung cancer. We must all do more to address lung cancer, for all communities,” Wimmer said. “To turn the tide against this deadly disease, Congress needs to protect and expand access to quality and affordable healthcare that helps more people who may be at high risk get screened, and ensures that those diagnosed have access to treatment. No one who wants treatment should have to forgo care due to lack of access or cost of treatment."

This announcement was originally released on November 17, 2020, by the American Lung Association. It is republished with permission.

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