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Examining Race in America: Health Care

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Examining Race in America: Health Care



Community Health expert [Tonya S. Roberson](#) was working as a nutritionist in 1995, when her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer.

Dr. Roberson's mother, a Chicago Public School teacher for more than 30 years, noted that doctors showed little compassion as she sought explanations of medications and treatment plans. Most alarming was a note in the medical file that could have led doctors to remove the wrong breast, Roberson said.

"The entire process made me realize that the only reason we got past those barriers was because we had education about the health care system," said Roberson, the current Director of Community Engagement, Program Development and Academic Support in the [College of Health and Human Services](#) at [Governors State University](#). "So, I left my position as a nutritionist and started a journey to educate others on how to navigate health care."

More than 25 years later, Roberson knows there is still a need for health care advocates. Her work of eradicating issues that plague residents in urban centers leaves her with the sobering realization that little has changed to close the gap on disparities in health care among African Americans.

Rates for all major causes of death are higher for African Americans than for non-Hispanic whites, contributing in part to a shorter life expectancy for both African American men and women.

Roberson studies these uneven patterns of health outcomes for Blacks. She says systemic racism evidenced by lack of access to health care, low quality housing, poor nutrition and other social determinants lead to higher mortality and morbidity rates in the African American community.

“The fact remains that Blacks get sicker and die at a younger age from preventable ailments and diseases than whites,” she said. “These health inequities are the growing result of both past and present ethnic and racial discrimination.”

Governors State's [Social Work](#) Program Coordinator [Lorri Glass](#) says mental health disparities exacerbate the issue.

“If you are dealing with a lack of resources and stress in the environment, it will impact your mental health, and mental health and physical health are connected,” Glass said. “If someone is stressing, they will have trouble sleeping and experience appetite changes, which could mean weight gain, which leads to so many other issues.”

Click [here](#) and listen to a podcast where Dr. Lorri Glass discusses barriers to mental health here. To hear Dr. Tonya S. Roberson explore and discuss strategies to reduce disparities in Black communities—heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic—[listen to the “Southland Health and Wellness Hour Podcast.”](#) Scroll down to view individual episodes.

Visit ["Examining Race in America"](#) to view the full multimedia series.

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