

# Office of Health Equity Veterans Health Administration Department of Veterans Affairs



## AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN HEART DISEASE DISPARITIES FACT SHEET

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### INTRODUCTION

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) serves a Veteran population that is increasingly racially and ethnically diverse. Equitable access to high-quality care for all Veterans is a major tenet of the VA healthcare mission. The Office of Health Equity (OHE) champions the elimination of health disparities and achieving health equity for all Veterans.

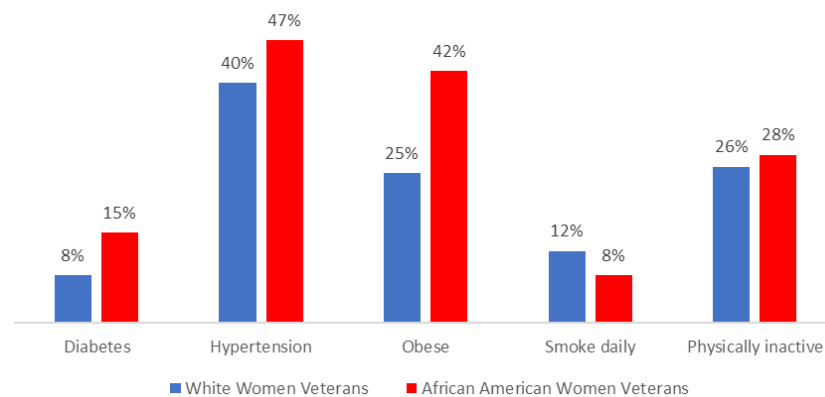
The Office of Health Equity-QUERI Partnered Evaluation Center examines and evaluates health outcomes and healthcare quality across the entire VA healthcare system paying special attention to whether gender, geographical location, or individuals that are members of minority population groups experience disparities in care. Since the birth of the Nation, African-Americans of every generation have given their lives in service to the United States.

### HEALTH DISPARITIES

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for women in the United States, and the second leading cause of death (after cancer) among women Veterans who use VA health care. Among African-American women Veterans who use VA health care,

heart disease accounts for approximately one in five deaths. Compared with non-Hispanic white women Veterans using VA health care, African-American women Veterans have higher rates of cardiovascular risk factors.

Rates of Heart Disease Risk Factors in African American and White Women Veterans



There are several differences between African-American women and non-Hispanic white women in the presence and severity of cardiovascular risk factors. A higher proportion of African-American women Veterans have diabetes, hypertension and obesity compared with non-Hispanic white women Veterans. However, the two groups did not differ significantly in proportions that smoked daily or that were physically inactive.



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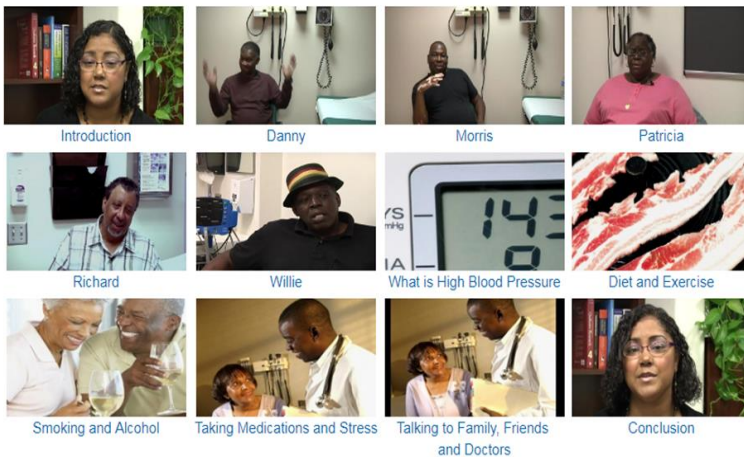
Veterans Health Administration  
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## REDUCING DISPARITIES

### *Using Research to Reduce Disparities*

The Office of Health Equity supports VA researchers who work to reduce health disparities by targeting interventions aimed at Veteran groups at higher risk for poor health outcomes. Health outcomes are closely connected to a Veteran's social environment and socioeconomic status.

Module 1 - Journeys with High Blood Pressure



### *National Partnership*

VA and American Heart Association (AHA) have a long-standing partnership to bring awareness and knowledge about heart disease and stroke. Each February, AHA and VA join efforts to celebrate Go Red for Women during American Heart Month to encourage women Veterans to take charge of their heart health and reduce their risks. This year the focus is *Stress Less. Move More. Eat Smart.* VA

A VA research team created a series of videos of Veterans discussing their experiences with high blood pressure offering tips on taking medications, talking to health care providers, and making other healthy behavior changes.

According to the 2016 study evaluating the impact of these videos on improving hypertension control in African American Veterans, Veterans who watched the videos reported greater intentions to:

- Become more physically active;
- Use salt substitutes;
- Talk openly with their doctor about hypertension; and
- Remembering to take their hypertension medications.

These videos are available on OHE's website at <https://www.va.gov/HEALTHY/Tools.asp>

encourages staff and Veterans to participate in Wear Red Day on the first Friday in February. This annual event unites people nationwide around the common goal of eradicating heart disease. In addition to the national celebration, Women's Health Programs at each VA Medical Center host local Go Red activities and initiatives throughout the month of February.

**For more information about the Office of Health Equity visit:** <https://www.va.gov/healthequity/>

#### References

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Goldstein K.M., et al. Characteristics and health care preferences associated with cardiovascular disease risk among Women Veterans. *Women's Health Issues.* 2017 Nov - Dec;27(6):700-706.

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