# Significant Decrease in Black-White Mortality Gap During Past Thirty Years; Decline Driven by Progress Against Cancer, Heart Disease, and HIV, Study Shows

## The findings by American Cancer Society researchers highlight priority areas for advancing racial health equity

**ATLANTA, November 23, 2026 —** A major health gap in America is shrinking. A new study by researchers at the American Cancer Society (ACS) shows the historic divide in death rates between Black and White men and women in the United States narrowed dramatically between 1993 and 2023. Excess mortality among Black adults plummeted by 56% for men and 68% for women. The report also shows the leading drivers of disease have shifted. Cancer was the single biggest reason Black men died at higher rates than White men in the early 1990s, but today it ranks sixth, and HIV (human immunodeficiency virus), which was devastating Black communities, has dropped to tenth. The findings are to be published today in the journal *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

“We are so encouraged by our findings as the data gives a clear picture of how much progress has been made,” said Dr. Hyuna Sung, scientific director, cancer surveillance research at the American Cancer Society and lead author of the study. “It’s a huge public health achievement, showing that health inequity is avoidable.”

For the study, researchers analyzed U.S. mortality data from the National Center for Health Statistics between 1990 and 2023 to determine which causes of death contributed most to changes in the mortality gap between non-Hispanic Black and White Americans. They compared excess mortality rates for all-cause and 24 causes of death and examined the differences by sex and age.

Planned in 2025, the research coincides with the 40th anniversary of the 1985 Heckler Report, a landmark federal study that first documented the extent of health disparities affecting racial and ethnic minorities in the United States.

The results showed that in 2023, all-cause excess mortality rates for Black compared to White individuals decreased by 56% for males and by 68% for females compared with 1993. Declines in cancer, heart disease, and HIV in both males and females were the primary drivers of the reduction in the mortality gap. However, progress was slowed by ongoing or worsening disparities in nephritis and accidents (including drug overdoses) in both sexes; maternal mortality in females; and homicide and legal intervention, diabetes, hypertension without heart disease, and cerebrovascular diseases in males.

Of special note was that the homicide gap among Black men was shrinking in the 1990s, but then sharply increased after 2010 and became worse during the COVID-19 pandemic. This erased an estimated two decades of progress. The COVID-19 pandemic itself nearly doubled the overall gap in 2020 before it came back down.

“These pandemic trends remind us that progress is fragile and can be lost quickly. It’s why we must stay vigilant,” added Sung. “Sustained investment in population-level prevention and early detection can yield measurable, broadly distributed health gains, but there are many more areas where further efforts are needed to continue to reduce racial health inequities. The gap is still large.”

“In order to continue this critical progress, we must keep working to ensure access to cancer prevention, early detection and treatment services. This is vital to reducing all cancer disparities and ending cancer as we know it, for everyone," said Lisa A. Lacasse, president of the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, ACS' advocacy affiliate. "We call on lawmakers to support policies that help address the disparities facing each of our communities and help reduce the cancer burden, such as increasing funding for federal and state tobacco control programs, including proven tobacco cessation services, improving access to cancer screenings and follow-up testing, and removing barriers to accessing personalized medicine.”

Other ACS researchers contributing to this study include Chenxi Jiang, MPH, Dr. Farhad Islami, and senior author Dr. Ahmedin Jemal.

**Additional ACS Resources:**

- Cancer Disparities Research
- Cancer Disparities Report 2025
- Cancer Disparities: An American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network Chartbook
- Voices of Black Women Study

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**About the American Cancer Society**
The American Cancer Society is a leading cancer-fighting organization with a vision to end cancer as we know it, for everyone. For more than 110 years, we have been improving the lives of people with cancer and their families as the only organization combating cancer through advocacy, research, and patient support. We are committed to ensuring everyone has an opportunity to prevent, detect, treat, and survive cancer. To learn more, visit cancer.org or call our 24/7 helpline at 1-800-227-2345. Connect with us on Facebook, X, and Instagram.

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