



# DISPARITIES IN ORGAN DONATION

Research has demonstrated the disproportionate impact of kidney-related issues on minority populations, which has created tremendous health disparities in regards to access to treatment for chronic diseases. A combination of economic, cultural, social, biological and clinical factors contributes to an increased prevalence of kidney-related health issues among minority populations. Furthermore, minority populations have a greater likelihood of developing kidney failure but are less likely to be treated for it with either dialysis or a kidney transplant.<sup>[1]</sup> Taking this into consideration, it is important to examine the root causes of disparities in organ donation among minority populations and find ways to improve the number of minority organ donors.

## *Disparity of Kidney-Related Health Issues among Minority Populations*

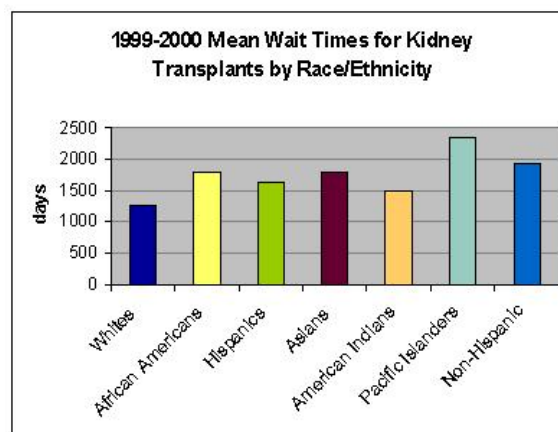
Higher prevalence of kidney disease, diabetes, hypertension, and Hepatitis B among minority populations influences the need for organ donation and transplantation for these individuals. The following statistics demonstrate the disparities associated with kidney-related health issues:

- African Americans are 4.5 times more likely to develop kidney disease than Caucasians<sup>[2]</sup>;
- American Indians are 3.6 times more likely to develop kidney disease than Caucasians<sup>[2]</sup>;
- Hispanics are 2 times more likely to develop kidney disease than Caucasians<sup>[2]</sup>; and
- Asians are 1.6 times more likely to develop kidney disease than Caucasians.<sup>[2]</sup>

As described above, minority populations have an increased likelihood of developing kidney-related health problems.

## *Disparity in Organ Donation by Minority Populations*

It should be noted that the disparity of kidney-related health problems among minority populations also extends to the number of minorities who register as organ donors. The number of minority organ donors is not proportionate to the number of minority individuals on the transplantation waiting list. With a lower number of minorities becoming organ donors, the time spent on a waiting list will increase for minority individuals in need of a kidney transplant.



Source: Brennan V and Maleque S. *Factline: Tracking Health in Underserved Communities*.

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The lack of public awareness among minority populations about the organ shortage in our country is another factor that contributes to the overall disparity in organ donation. A study found that Asian Americans found it hard to believe that Asians wait longer than Caucasians for an organ transplant.<sup>[3]</sup> Another study found that African Americans are less likely to consent to cadaveric organ donation and living organ donation.<sup>[4]</sup> Therefore, the need for organ donation among minority populations is disproportionately greater and results in the need to address ways to encourage organ donation among minority populations to increase access to donor organs and improve overall health outcomes. Preliminary measures to encourage organ donation among minority populations include: raising awareness about organ shortages affecting minority populations, improving approaches used by healthcare physicians to discuss the issue of organ donation with their minority patients, and encouraging minority patients to become registered donors in their respective states.

**Sources:**

- [1] Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. (2004). 2004 National Healthcare Disparities Report, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- [2] Office of Minority Health. (2006). Highlights in Minority Health – Reducing Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Chronic Kidney Disease and Kidney Failure. Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/omh/Highlights/2006/HMar06K.htm>.
- [3] Weaver M, Shiu-Thorton S, Spigner C, et al. (2002). Organ Donation Among Asians and Pacific Islanders: Preliminary Research Findings. *J Health Poor Underserved*, 14(2): 182-193.
- [4] Siminoff LA and Arnold R. (1999). Increasing Organ Donation in the African American Community: Altruism In the Face of an Untrustworthy System. *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 130(7): 607-609.

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