



MEDICARE PREVENTIVE SERVICES POLICY RESOURCE CENTER

REDUCING THE BURDEN OF HEART DISEASE IN WOMEN

HEART DISEASE & WOMEN

Cardiovascular disease (CVD) or “heart disease” is a broad category of diseases that affect the heart and circulatory system. The most common types of heart disease include coronary heart disease, stroke, hypertension (high blood pressure) and heart failure. Risk factors associated with heart disease include diabetes, high cholesterol and triglyceride levels, high blood pressure, overweight and obesity, physical inactivity, and tobacco use.

Many women misperceive the prevalence of heart disease in women and are unaware of the associated risk factors. One study found that only 13 percent of women in the United States believed that heart disease and stroke are serious health burdens to women. In addition, the study revealed that minority women have even lower awareness of risk factors.

QUICK FACTS

- Nearly 43 million women have a history of heart disease and stroke including 7.3 million women who have coronary heart disease.
- Heart disease is the leading cause of death in women in the United States; approximately 39 percent of all female deaths are attributed to heart disease.
- One in two women will die of heart disease or stroke, compared with one in 25 women who will die of breast cancer.
- Approximately 42 percent of women who have heart attacks die within 1 year compared with 24 percent of men.
- Among heart disease patients, women are less likely than men to use low-dose aspirin therapy and fare worse in treatment for heart attack and congestive heart failure.
- Death rates in 2005 from high blood pressure were 40.3 for black females versus only 15.1 for white females.
- Among women age 20 and older, 77.7 percent of non-Hispanic blacks, 73 percent of Mexican Americans and 57.5 percent of non-Hispanic whites are overweight or obese.

ACTIONS FOR LEGISLATORS

- Educate women about the risk factors associated with heart disease; the benefits of establishing good relationships with their physicians; and the importance of early screening and treatment.
- Increase the availability of screenings and treatments to low-income women and minorities through community clinics and public health departments.
- Reduce the disparities in health plans, quality of care indicators, and treatment utilization rates between women and men and races by supporting awareness campaigns, developing health benefit packages with heart disease prevention and ensuring insurance parity.
- For eligible women, promote the utilization of Medicare’s preventive services including cholesterol and triglyceride levels screenings, diabetes screening and supplies, and the one-time physical exam.
- Create or support health initiatives to promote life style modifications: cigarette smoking cessation, 30 minutes a day of physical activity, heart healthy diets, weight maintenance and reduction, and evaluation and treatment of depression.

SOURCES

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