

## COVID-19 Shows More Than Just Lack of Preparation

You put on your tennis shoes and go for a soothing run. Before you know it, you are back home, safe. That was not the reality for Ahmaud Arbery, an unarmed African American jogger who was killed earlier this year. This is a tragic situation that would not even be an issue to consider for many—a tragic situation that increases the anxiety of an entire race constantly, uncertain of how any sudden movement might change your life forever. As Arbery's death demonstrates, yet again, the disparities in privilege between blacks and whites are often the difference between life and death. How do these play out, then, in health care, and how are these inequalities magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Imagine the following scenario: Once health professionals develop a vaccine for SARS-CoV-2, it is extremely likely that only those that are insured will be able to afford it. If only 25% of the minority population can afford the solution, and 75% can't, the disparity in health care will surely persist even after the pandemic ceases, leading to a huge population of the country living in neglect, pain, and uncertainty. Thus, we must make a potential vaccine accessible to all. If not, the result will be analogous to the trend we saw with the [war on drugs](#). Black people will have higher rates of non-vaccinations than whites.

In continuum with race, the pandemic also bestows social concerns regarding gender. The increase in time at home presents several issues for women globally. [Jewel Gausman](#) proposes that during this pandemic, "women face a higher chance of exposure due to occupation and role of primary caregivers." Women working in hospitals are constantly in contact with patients affected with SARS-CoV-2. In addition, women of color are the highest population in poverty and thus the most exposed to health-related issues such as SARS-CoV-2.

These are all common obstacles minorities faced by minorities within our communities. Unfortunately, they do not possess the privilege that their white counterparts do. Historically, such privilege has created disparities in many areas such as affordability of health care. However, the ongoing [COVID-19 pandemic](#) will further fuel these disparities if we do not change our course of action.

Naysayers who would dispute the validity of health disparities are surely being proven incorrect by epidemiological studies. Despite the lower testing practices in the United States compared to other countries, new medical studies have demonstrated higher percentages of COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2) among the African American community – up to [33.1%](#) of the community's population. In fact, one study showed that African Americans and Latinos in New York were [twice as likely](#) to contract and die from the disease than their white and Asian counterparts.

The issue regarding [privilege](#) among race and gender is the driving force towards such disparities. Grocery store shelves have been completely wiped out of

paper towels, tissues, masks, toilet paper, and other hygienic products critical to reducing the spread of the virus. Thus, considering that [unemployment rates](#) are generally higher for people of color than whites, it is logical to suggest that whites will have greater resources to hoard these supplies.

More importantly, however, a [recent study](#) of nearly 225,000 showed that only a quarter of insurance holders were people of color. Why is this important? Because a health care system that is already engulfed in disparities, such as ours, will only be further affected with the pandemic we have on our hands.

We need to change to a new model of health care. Robert Huckman explains, in his article, [What will U.S. Health Care look like after the pandemic?](#), that for the time being, “most insurers are moving to models that temporarily relieve patients of copayments and deductibles while also guaranteeing coverage for COVID-19 related costs.”

Looking for a more long-term plan of action, Erik Wright and Joel Rogers suggest in their book, [American Society, How it Really Works](#), that striving towards universal healthcare would solve the issues regarding insurance fees and processes. Although a universal system would require healthy people to pay for others’ medical care, the benefits still seem to outweigh the costs. Advantages of adopting such a system include eliminating costly medical care, increasing population health, and eliminating private for-profit insurance companies. It would also be extremely beneficial to increase diversity among health care professionals, increase educational awareness, especially in underrepresented areas, and to continue funding community health workers and interpreters. Taking these measures will increase trust, confidence, communication, and quality of care between patients and providers. This will definitely decrease the disparities we see in health care.

So how do we face these hard facts? The answer is right in front of us. Education. We must spread the truth among the population. The hardest part of detecting disadvantages and disparities are acknowledging their presence in the first place. We must be educated by the past to improve our future. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. stated in his speech, [Beyond Vietnam](#), “We are now faced with the fact, my friends, that tomorrow is today”. It is never “too late” to get back on the right path.