

# RESEARCH REVIEW

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**February 9, 2021**

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Examining Health Inequities

## **Racial Disparities in Opioid Overdoses During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

[JAMA](#)

The increase in fatal and nonfatal opioid overdoses in Philadelphia during the COVID-19 pandemic fell disproportionately on Black individuals. Fatal overdoses among Black Philadelphians spiked by more than 50% in the three months after the city's stay-at-home order compared to the same months in the prior year and the three months leading up to the pandemic. The rate fell by 24% for white Philadelphians during that same period. These trends in opioid overdose suggest that the pandemic has exacerbated racial inequalities.

Opioid use disorder treatment, harm reduction, and overdose prevention efforts should be targeted to Black and other communities at higher risk.

**+ Steps towards Fighting the Opioid Crisis:** IBI Researcher Erin Peterson, MPH, discusses her [research](#) on the productivity implications of opioid use in the workforce and [what employers can do](#) to combat the opioid crisis—including understanding risks within their workforce.

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## **COVID-19 Cases and Deaths Associated with Race/Ethnicity Population Composition and Income Inequality**

[JAMA](#)

U.S. counties with higher income inequality had higher COVID-19 infection and death rates during the first 200 days of the pandemic. A 1% rise in a county's income inequality corresponded with a 2% rise in COVID-19 incidence and 3% rise in mortality. Counties with a higher proportion of Black or Hispanic residents also saw an increase in the number of new COVID-19 cases and mortality due to COVID-19. A 1% increase in a county's Black population was associated with a 1.9% increase in incidence and a 2.6% increase in mortality. A 1% increase in a county's Hispanic population was associated with a 2.4% and a 1.9% increase, respectively. Researchers found that income inequality was harmful regardless of race/ethnicity composition. Additionally, counties in states with the Affordable Care Act Medicaid expansion had a 32% lower incidence of COVID-19 compared to counties not in states with the expansion.

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## **Coverage under the Affordable Care Act Reduced Income Inequality**

[Health Affairs](#)

States that expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) saw a 12% decline in economic inequality, compared to an 8% decline in states that did not expand Medicaid. The extension of ACA coverage increased spending power and reduced income inequality—most dramatically for people who were lower income, had less education, were younger, and/or were in a minority race/ethnic group.

**+ Health and Productivity Implications:** IBI's 2019 [report](#) found that one in three employees with low income went without healthcare they needed, and those who experienced a cost-related barrier to care had 70% more sick days than their peers.

## **Employees Providing Care for Someone with Dementia Experience Worse Work Outcomes Than Other Caregivers**

[Aging & Mental Health](#)

Canadian employees who cared for high-needs dementia patients reported higher levels of stress, more depressed mood, and absenteeism than their peers who were caring for lower-needs dementia patients or older adults without dementia. They also reported higher levels of job-caregiving conflict and lower levels of self-efficacy, feelings of mastery and perceptions of control.

**+ Supporting Caregivers in the Workforce:** IBI's [caregiving report](#) revealed that while work policies such as paid leave and flexible scheduling may allow caregivers to take the time off when needed, these policies do not fully alleviate the burden of caregiving. Programs and resources that aid with caregiving tasks at hand could relieve some burdens while helping to safeguard employee health and productivity.

## **Lessons Learned from Implementation of Physical Activity and Healthy Eating Policies in a Large, Public Health Organization**

[JOEM](#)

An examination of health promotion policies within a large public health organization found that more locations implemented physical activity policies than healthy eating policies. The study also found that having clear, consistent policies with communication materials and training aided in policy implementation. Leadership and cross-departmental support were helpful for adherence to policies.

**+ A Culture of Health Lends Well for Employee Engagement:** Research found that [drivers of a culture of health](#), particularly leadership and co-worker support, are positively associated with employee engagement in wellness programs.

## **Cancer Screening Tests and Diagnoses Significantly Decreased in the Beginning Months of COVID-19 Pandemic**

[JAMA](#)

Cancer screenings in a large Boston healthcare system dropped by 60%-82%

from March to June 2020 compared to the same months the year before, the three months preceding the pandemic, and the three months after this initial pandemic period. Fewer screenings led to a 19%-78% drop in diagnoses during this period, with an estimated 1,438 cancerous and precancerous diagnoses missed. However, the percentage of screening tests with a cancer diagnosis was higher than normal during this period, indicating a prioritization for screening high-risk patients.

**+ Screening Gaps Evident Prior to Pandemic:** Even before the pandemic, CDC researchers found that [screenings for certain cancers](#) were under national targets. These screening gaps have health and productivity implications which are outlined by findings in [IBI's latest screening report](#).



#### **HEALTH AND PRODUCTIVITY AT WORK**

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#### **Upcoming Events**

##### **February 10, 2021: Webinar Series**

- [How Employers Can Address the Impact and Cost of Chronic Conditions Affecting their Workforce](#)

##### **July 29, 2021: Save the Date**

- [IBI/GPBCH Data and Analytics Symposium](#)

##### **October 5-6, 2021: Save the Date**

- [IBI/Conference Board Health and Productivity Forum](#)