Lost Earnings from Racial Disparities in Cancer Mortality

$3.2 Billion in lost earnings would be avoided in 2015 alone had mortality and earning been equal between blacks and whites

June 9, 2020 By American Cancer Society

Study Puts Price Tag on Lost Earnings from Racial Disparities in Cancer Mortality

A new American Cancer Society study puts a price tag on racial disparities in cancer mortality, finding that $3.2 billion in lost earnings would have been avoided in 2015 if non-Hispanic (NH) blacks had equal years of life lost from cancer deaths and earning rates as NH whites. The study appears in JNCI Cancer Spectrum.

Little is known about disparities in economic burden due to premature cancer deaths by race/ethnicity in the United States. To learn more, investigators led by Jingxuan Zhao, MPH, compared person-years of life lost (PYLL) and lost earnings due to premature cancer deaths by race/ethnicity. PYLL was calculated using national cancer death and life expectancy data. That was combined with annual median earnings to generate lost earnings. PYLL and lost earnings were then compared among individuals who died at age 16-84 years due to cancer by racial/ethnic groups: NH white, NH black, NH Asian or Pacific Islander (API), and Hispanic.

They found that in 2015, age-standardized lost earning rates (per 100,000 person-years) were $34.9 million for NH whites, $43.5 million for NH blacks, $22.2 million for APIs, and $24.5 million for Hispanics. NH blacks had higher age-standardized PYLL and lost earning rates than NH whites for 13 out of 19 cancer sites studied.

“If age-specific PYLL and lost earning rates for NH blacks were the same as those of NH whites, 241,334 PYLLs and $3.2 billion lost earnings (22.6% of the total lost earnings among NH blacks) would have been avoided,” write the authors. “Improving equal access to effective cancer prevention, screening, and treatment will be important in reducing the disproportional economic burden associated with racial/ethnic disparities,” they conclude.

Article: Zhao J, Miller KD, Islami F, Zheng Z, Han X, Ma J, Jemal A, and Yabroff KR (2020). Racial/Ethnic Disparities in Lost Earnings from Cancer Deaths in the United States. JNCI Cancer Spectrum DOI: 10.1093/jncics/pkaa038

This announcement was originally released on June 3, 2020, by the American Cancer Society. It is republished with permission.

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