

EDUCATOR RESOURCES



Health Care Perceptions and Barriers to Access Among Black Immigrant Populations

Many Black immigrants to the U.S., including people from African and Caribbean countries, have unique perceptions about health and the health system, and experience barriers to access that are unique to this population. This resource provides some information about cultural norms and strategies for communication with African and Caribbean immigrant populations.

Black immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean represent many different countries, ethnicities, cultures and over 2,100 languages¹. It is important to understand and address some of the cultural differences this audience may face. Doing so can help you use language and communication styles that improve access to health information and health care.

As compared to U.S.-born Blacks and African Americans, Black immigrant populations²:

- Are less likely to have health insurance
- Are less likely to have access to health care services
- Are less accustomed to seeking health care services
- Have lower health literacy and less understanding of the U.S. health care system
- Tend to prefer complementary and alternative medicine, and non-Western treatments
- Fear being discriminated against due to³:
 - Immigrant status
 - Skin color
 - Accent
 - Socio-economic status

NOTE

The information contained here will not apply to all immigrants you meet. It is important to understand your audience well so that you can respond to their needs effectively.

Strategies for Communication

A strong understanding of the culture, language and beliefs of the population being served will help address and improve the health care literacy and overall communication with individual patients¹.

- Assist with linking your audience to organizations that can assist them to enroll in health insurance.
- Discuss with your audience the importance of seeing a doctor for a checkup and when they are sick or injured.
- Tailor health information to specific ethnic groups within your community.
- Utilize interpreters and translators to help you communicate accurate health information to your audience.
- Encourage collaboration between community health workers and physicians.
- Do not attempt to change your audiences' beliefs in traditional or alternative medicine.
- Assist with linking your audience members to a physician they feel comfortable with and trust.

1 Heine, B. & Nurse, B. African Languages: An Introduction. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

2 Wafula, E.G. & Snipes, S.A. "Barriers to Health Care Access Faced by Black Immigrants in the US: Theoretical Considerations and Recommendations," *Immigrant Minority Health*, 16 (2014): 689-698.

3 Edberg, M., Cleary, S., & Vyas, S. "A Trajectory Model for Understanding and Assessing Health Disparities in Immigrant/Refugee Communities," *J Immigr Minor Health*, 13 (2011): 576-584.