

Plagued by chronic illnesses, elderly blacks dying at alarming rate

They are perishing quietly, out of sight, in homes and apartment buildings, senior housing complexes, nursing homes and hospitals, [disproportionately poor](#), [frail](#) and ill, after enduring a lifetime of racism and its attendant [adverse health effects](#).

Yet, older Black Americans have received little attention as protesters proclaim that Black Lives Matter and experts churn out studies about the coronavirus.

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A KHN analysis of [data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) underscores the extent of their vulnerability. It found that African Americans ages 65 to 74 died of COVID-19 five times as often as whites. In the 75-to-84 group, the death rate for Blacks was 3½ times greater.

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Social and economic disadvantage, reinforced by racism, plays a significant part in unequal outcomes. Throughout their lives, Blacks have [poorer access to health care](#) and receive services of lower quality than does the general population. Starting in middle age, the toll becomes evident: more chronic medical conditions, which [worsen over time](#), and earlier deaths.

Several conditions — diabetes, chronic kidney disease, obesity, heart failure and pulmonary hypertension, among others — [put older Blacks at heightened risk](#) of becoming seriously ill and dying from COVID-19.

Yet many vulnerable Black seniors are deeply distrustful of government and health care institutions, complicating efforts to mitigate the pandemic's impact.

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