

Black Americans are under-represented in genetic studies. Here's why that's an issue — and what's being done to address it

The overwhelming majority of genetic data is from people of European ancestry.

As of early January, nearly 96 percent of participants across more than 5,500 studies looking for genetic variants associated with disease or other traits were of European descent, according to the [GWAS Diversity Monitor](#), a real-time online tracker developed and maintained by the Leverhulme Centre for Demographic Science at the University of Oxford.

Those with African American or Afro-Caribbean ancestry amount to just 0.18 percent of participants; Hispanic or Latino populations just 0.23 percent. That means efforts aspiring to use DNA to identify the best treatments for any individual patient, what's commonly known as precision medicine, are heavily skewed toward white people.

There are many reasons behind the stark disparity. A big one, says geneticist Tshaka Cunningham, is distrust of the medical community, born from decades of exploitation and abuse.

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Cunningham is working with others to build trust and overcome the damage of the past. He is chief scientific officer of Polaris Genomics, a company studying the genetic underpinnings that put some people at increased risk of certain behavioral health conditions, including post-traumatic stress disorder.

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