



The Case for Better Care

Chronic Illness: Who's at Risk?

Chronic Conditions Disproportionately Affect Older Adults

- Older adults are more likely to have multiple chronic conditions. Nine in ten older Americans (age 65 and older) have at least one chronic health condition and 77 percent have multiple chronic conditions.¹
- The average 75-year-old has three chronic conditions and takes five prescription drugs.²
- Among Medicare beneficiaries, nine out of 10 deaths are associated with nine specific chronic conditions: congestive heart failure, chronic lung disease, cancer, coronary artery disease, renal failure, peripheral vascular disease, diabetes, chronic liver disease, and dementia.³

The Impact on Older Women

- Because women tend to live longer than men, older women are more likely to have chronic conditions, many of which carry multiple, significant health concerns.⁴
- Often, these older women are also caregivers to spouses, other relatives or friends who are also suffering from one or more chronic health conditions.⁵

The Impact on Low-Income Older Persons

- Older adults living below the poverty level are more likely than those at higher income levels to have multiple chronic conditions.⁶
- In 2005, the percentage of Medicare beneficiaries who delayed care was significantly higher for poor, near-poor and middle income beneficiaries than for high-income beneficiaries.⁷
- Low-income adults ages 55 to 84 were more likely than adults in the same age group who were not poor to have visited an emergency room in the past year.⁸

The Impact on Older Racial and Ethnic Minority Populations

- Health disparities pervade our nation. Racial and ethnic minorities experience more chronic diseases and higher mortality rates from these diseases.⁹
- Among adults aged 65 and older, nearly two out of three (65 percent) African Americans have hypertension, compared with 49 percent of older Hispanics and 47 percent of the older White population.¹⁰
- One out of four Hispanics aged 65 and older and 23 percent of older African Americans have diabetes, compared with 14 percent of the older adult White population.¹¹

MORE »

- Thirty-nine percent of White adults aged 65 and older reported very good or excellent health in 2004, compared with 24 percent of non-Hispanic older African Americans and 29 percent of older Hispanics.¹²
- Black and Hispanic Medicare beneficiaries are more likely than non-Hispanic White beneficiaries to delay needed care due to cost.¹³

¹ Machlin, S., Cohen, J., & Bearegard, K. (2008). Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. *Health Care Expenses for Adults with Chronic Conditions, 2005*. (Statistical Brief #203). Retrieved July 22, 2009, from http://www.meps.ahrq.gov/mepsweb/data_files/publications/st203/stat203.pdf.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Merck Institute of Aging & Health (2004). *The State of Aging and Health in America 2004*. Retrieved October 2, 2009 from, http://www.cdc.gov/aging/pdf/State_of_Aging_and_Health_in_America_2004.pdf.

³ The Dartmouth Institute for Health Policy and Clinical Practice (2008). *Tracking the Care of Patients with Severe Chronic Illness: The Dartmouth Atlas of Health Care 2008*. The Trustees of Dartmouth College. Retrieved October 13, 2009, from http://www.dartmouthatlas.org/atlas/2008_Chronic_Care_Atlas.pdf.

⁴ Anderson, G. (2007). *Chartbook, Chronic Conditions: Making the Case for Ongoing Care*. Johns Hopkins University. Retrieved October 1, 2009, from http://www.fightchronicdisease.org/news/pfcd/documents/ChronicCareChartbook_FINAL.pdf

⁵ Anderson, G. (2007). *Chartbook, Chronic Conditions: Making the Case for Ongoing Care*. Johns Hopkins University. Retrieved October 1, 2009, from http://www.fightchronicdisease.org/news/pfcd/documents/ChronicCareChartbook_FINAL.pdf

⁶ National Center for Healthcare Statistics (2006). *Health, United States, 2006*. Hyattsville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved October 4, 2009, from <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/hs/hs06.pdf>.

⁷ Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2008). *National Healthcare Disparities Report*. Retrieved October 6, 2009, from <http://www.ahrq.gov/qual/nhqr08/nhqr08.pdf>.

⁸ Schoenborn, C. & Heyman, K. (2009). *Health Characteristics for Adults Aged 55 and Over: United States, 2004-2007*. (National Health Statistics Report No. 16). Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved July 23, 2009, from <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhsr/nhsr016.pdf>.

⁹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2009). *The Power of Prevention: Chronic Disease...The Public Health Challenge of the 21st Century*. Retrieved July 23, 2009, from <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/publications/PowerOfPrevention/pdfs/2009-Power-of-Prevention.pdf>.

¹⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Merck Institute of Aging & Health (2004). *The State of Aging and Health in America 2004*. Retrieved October 2, 2009 from, http://www.cdc.gov/aging/pdf/State_of_Aging_and_Health_in_America_2004.pdf.

¹¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Merck Institute of Aging & Health (2004). *The State of Aging and Health in America 2004*. Retrieved October 2, 2009 from, http://www.cdc.gov/aging/pdf/State_of_Aging_and_Health_in_America_2004.pdf.

¹² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2007). *Trends in Health and Aging: Major Trends and Patterns in Health of Older Hispanics in the United States*. Retrieved October 5, 2009, from http://www.cdc.gov/NCHS/ppt/aging/hispanic_health.ppt#251 . 1. Trends in Health and Aging.

¹³ Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2008). *National Healthcare Disparities Report*. Retrieved October 6, 2009, from <http://www.ahrq.gov/qual/nhqr08/nhqr08.pdf>.