



“Leading from the Black”: How Black Women Lead Even When Ignored
Congressional Caucus on Black Women & Girls Roundtable
December 13, 2017

Black Women in the US: Workplace & Wellness

By:

Avis Jones-DeWeever, Ph.D.

Public Policy Advisor, Black Women’s Roundtable

Founder & CEO

Exceptional Leadership Institute for Women

Black Women & Wellness

March 23, 2017 marked the seventh anniversary of the Affordable Care Act. Although now under relentless attack, this historic legislation expanded access to medical care for millions across the country, including 2.3 million specifically within the Black community.¹ However, not all have had full benefit of this game-changing piece of legislation. Since its inception, 22 states continue to refuse to take advantage of Medicaid expansion, thereby leaving millions unnecessarily uninsured. Many of these same states, have engaged in political maneuvering restricting access to women’s reproductive health care services. While the target of their maneuvering was most keenly designed to restrict abortion access, in practice, the impacts of reducing health care services for women, particularly in rural areas appear to be much more far-reaching.² One issue in particular, which is moving in the wrong direction is the issue of maternal mortality. Black women in America have historically suffered ridiculously high maternal mortality rates. In fact, our chances of dying in pregnancy or during childbirth is unlike any other group of women in the industrialized world. But as bad as it has been, recent statistics suggest, the problem is now intensifying precisely as access to reproductive health care services dwindle across the country.

Taken together, these two circumstances have led to a lived reality that unnecessarily endangers not only the health of Black women, but their very lives. How ironic, that in many instances, the same states that continue to reject Medicaid expansion, are also the states that have mounted an all-out war against women’s reproductive health care access, and in many instances, are the very states that are home to large segments of the Black community. The result is somewhat of a tragic perfect storm that makes receiving health care not only unnecessary difficult, but in some circumstances, practically impossible. As a result, Black women find themselves disproportionately among those negatively impacted by political agendas that seem bent on putting one hurdle after the other between American citizens and the health care that they need.

At this very moment, with the on-going political battles around access to the Affordable Care Act as well as continued threats to women’s reproductive health services, the lives of Black women are quite literally, left hanging in the balance.

1. The Health Care Coverage of Black Women Have Been Held Hostage by States That Rejected Medicaid Expansion.

- ❖ Black women who live in states that have accepted Medicaid expansion are much less likely to be uninsured than those who don’t. Fully 9 out of the top 10 states that boast the lowest percentage of uninsured Black women are states that have adopted Medicaid expansion.
- ❖ Overall, Massachusetts is the best state in American for Black women’s health care coverage, followed by the District of Columbia, Hawaii and Vermont.

Table 1: Ranking of the Percentage of Uninsured Black Women Under 65 in All States Plus the District of Columbia

State	% Uninsured	Ranking
Massachusetts	4.6	1
DC	6.7	2
Hawaii	7	3
Vermont	9.4	4
Delaware	9.9	5
New York	10.8	6
Maryland	11	7
Iowa	11.4	8
Connecticut	11.9	9
Wisconsin	12.5	10
Minnesota	12.7	11
Maine	13.4	12
Ohio	13.7	13
Pennsylvania	13.7	13
California	14.6	14
Michigan	14.7	15
New Hampshire	14.8	16
Colorado	14.9	17
South Dakota	14.9	17
Rhode Island	15	18
Tennessee	15	18
Oregon	15.2	19
Nebraska	15.4	20
New Jersey	15.5	21
Kansas	15.6	22

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013 Small Area Health Insurance Estimates

Note: Shaded Areas Denote States that Have Not Adopted Medicaid Expansion or Medicaid Expansion is Still Under Discussion in that State.

- ❖ Black Women who live in states that have failed to accept Medicaid expansions stand a much greater likelihood of going without health insurance. In fact, 9 of the 10 lowest ranked states when it comes to health insurance coverage for Black women have each failed to adopt the expansion of Medicaid.
- ❖ Among states that have Black populations that exceed 20% of their total population, only Maryland, DC, and Delaware rank among the top states when it comes to Black women’s health insurance coverage. All of the remaining states with high Black populations are located in the Deep South, and each of these states have rejected Medicaid expansion. In addition, all are among the worst in the nation when it comes to Black women’s health insurance coverage (NC, SC, GA, AL, MS, LA).

Table 2: Ranking of the Percentage of Uninsured Black Women Under 65 in All States Plus the District of Columbia (Continued)

State	% Uninsured	Ranking
Utah	15.6	22
Virginia	15.8	23
Arizona	15.9	24
Illinois	15.9	24
North Dakota	16.1	25
Washington	16.4	26
Alabama	17.7	27
Idaho	17.7	27
Wyoming	17.7	27
West Virginia	17.9	28
New Mexico	18.1	29
Indiana	18.2	30
Missouri	18.4	31
South Carolina	18.8	32
Arkansas	19.1	33
Kentucky	19.2	34
North Carolina	19.6	35
Texas	20.4	36
Oklahoma	21	37
Nevada	21.1	38
Mississippi	21.4	39
Alaska	21.5	40
Georgia	21.8	41
Louisiana	21.8	41
Montana	22.8	42

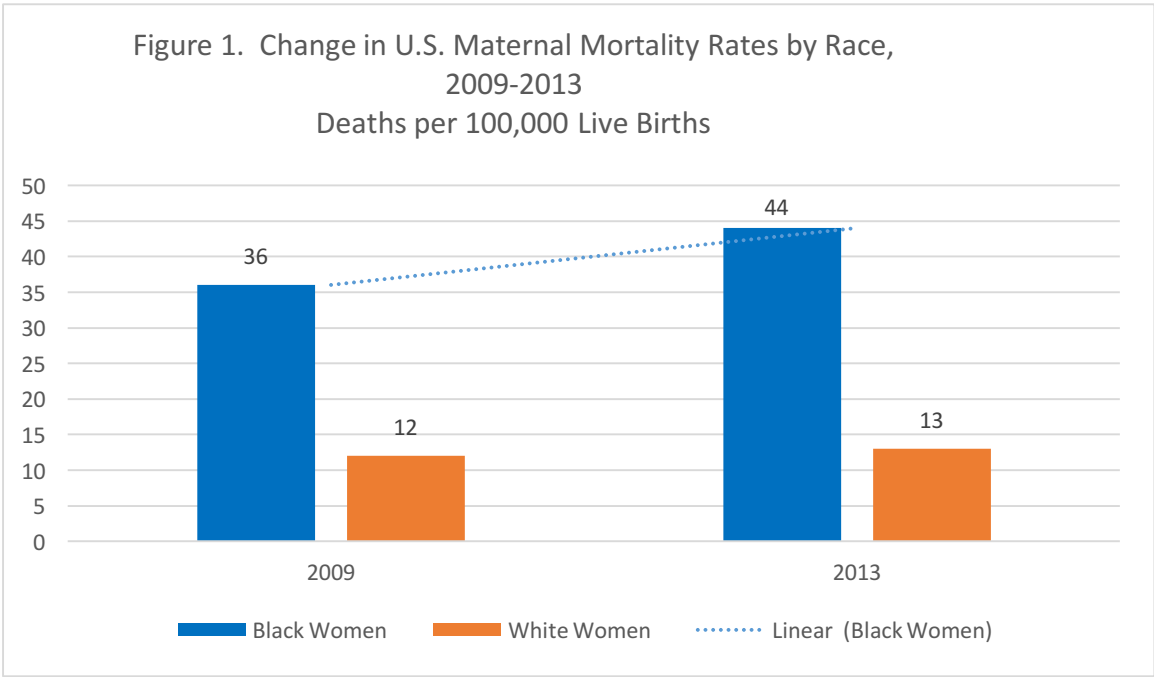
Florida	23.3	43
---------	------	----

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2013 Small Area Health Insurance Estimates

Note: Shaded Areas Denote States that Have Not Adopted Medicaid Expansion or Medicaid Expansion is Still Under Discussion in that State.

2. Shockingly High Black Women’s Maternal Mortality Rate Gets Even Higher.

- ❖ Black women are facing a maternal mortality crisis in America, and the silence is deafening. Unlike most nations around the world, America’s maternal mortality rate is actually increasing instead of decreasing. Maternal death rates have grown from 14.5 to 17.8 per 100,000 between 2007 and 2011. And as of 2014, they’ve skyrocketed to 28 per 100,000.³
- ❖ The rise in America’s maternal mortality rate can be attributed almost entirely to increases in maternal mortality among Black women. The most recent publically available data on the matter shows a rise in Black maternal mortality from a rate of 36 deaths to 44 deaths per 100,000 live births between 2009 and 2013. Maternal mortality for white women remained virtually unchanged during that time period (12 to 12.5 per 100,000).⁴
- ❖ Black Women’s maternal mortality rate is more than 10 times that of women in other industrialized nations. In fact, Black women in America would more than double their chance of surviving childbirth if they lived in Lebanon or Libya.⁵



Source: CDC Pregnancy Mortality Surveillance System and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration Maternal and Child Health Bureau. Child Health, USA 2017.

Black Women & The Workplace

Black Women Work.

There was no women's movement needed to infuse Black women into America's workforce, they've been here all along. And to this very day, they remain more likely than any woman any America to work. But despite their drive, determination, and unflinching commitment to the labor-force, the ability of Black women to ascend to official spaces of leadership are exceedingly rare.

According to the Center for Talent Innovation, Black women show up in the workforce already as experienced leaders. They are twice as likely as their white counterparts to engage as leaders in their communities by engaging in actions like running a school board, leading a youth initiative; or heading a charity or community organization.

And yet even with leadership experience, educational credentials, seniority, and other professional qualifications, Black women are more likely than anyone else to indicate that they've never received *any* active assistance from senior level colleagues meant to help them rise up the leadership ladder at work.

In essence, it's as if Black women have been professionally abandoned. Left to sink or swim on our their own in spite of their bold professional aspirations.

So what does all of this mean?

It means that at the end of the day, Black women are especially likely to find themselves in situations in which their aspirations and abilities consistently and habitually fail to align with their opportunities.

Although Black women are nearly three times more likely to indicate that they aspire to leadership than their white counterparts (22% vs. 8%), when we look at who actually acquires those positions, we find that white women make up almost a quarter of all executive leaders even though just 8% say that they aspire to such. Conversely Black women make up just 1.5% of those within executive leadership positions, even though fully 22% say that that's exactly where we want to be.

As a result, America is leaving significant levels of talent and ability completely untapped. We've settled into a space in which the advancement of women in the workplace, in practice, has almost exclusively been reserved for those women who are white.

The situation is even worse when you take a look at the very top of the leadership ladder. We know, for example, that as recently as the year 2000, only four white women had held the position of CEO of a Fortune 500 company. But by September of 2016 that number had grown more than five-fold to 22.⁶

And at the same time, that we've seen the representation of white women trending up, the representation of people of color, has actually been trending down. Today, we know that the number of Black CEO's have declined from of high of 12, to now only 5; for Latinos it's declined from a high of 13 to now only 9; and for Asian Americans, it's dropped from a high of 15 to just 10.⁷

This change has been so dramatic, that the number of white women who now serve as CEO's of Fortune 500 Companies is virtually equal to the number of all people of color of both genders combined.⁸

Now when we look at the situation experienced specifically by women of color, we find that only 2 have

ascended to the position of Fortune 500 CEO, one of which being Ursula Burns, the only Black woman to have done so in that list's 60-year history.

But even Burn's stellar example came to an end this year, when she was replaced by a white male colleague.

Ironically, this all is happening at a time when, quite frankly, we know better. We know that when it comes to this issue of diversity and inclusion, it's linked to things like increased creativity in the workplace, increased innovation, more profitability, and overall better outcomes for companies.

But even with this knowledge, in practice, what we find is that companies have ultimately placed a much greater priority on **gender diversity**, than it has on **racial diversity**, even though they're both critically important; and has ignored all together the importance of the intersection of the two.

Now remember, this is all happening precisely at a time in which the majority of babies born in America are babies of color. So as this nation is becoming browner and browner, the reality is, the power structures within it are becoming whiter and whiter, even if larger proportions of that whiteness now comes cloaked in a pencil skirt rather than a suit and tie. Until efforts directed at gender diversity includes at least proportional representation for Black women and other women of color, then there will be no true gender diversity at all.

¹ Dan Mangan. March 16, 2015. *16.5 M Gain Health Coverage Under Obamacare: Government*. CNBC. www.cnbc.com.

² Randa Morris. January 15, 2015. *Republicans are Killing Women: U.S. Maternal Death Rate Climbs; Female Deaths Rise in GOP Counties*

³ Ibid.

⁴ CDC Pregnancy Mortality Surveillance System and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration Maternal and Child Health Bureau. *Child Health, USA 2013*.

⁵ The World Bank. 2014. *Maternal Mortality Ratio*.

⁶ Jones-DeWeever, A. 2016. *How Exceptional Black Women Lead*. Incite Publishing Company.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.