



The State of Black Women & Reproductive Justice

CALIFORNIA

California is the most populous state in the US, with a population of 39.5 million people.

About six percent (5.7%) of the population is Black (compared to 14.4% nationally); 41% of the population is white; 39% is Hispanic; 15% is Asian; and 1.6% is American Indians and/or Alaska Native.¹

Legislative profile²

- Governor Gavin Newsom (D) supports reproductive autonomy.
- The California State House supports reproductive autonomy.
- The California State Senate supports reproductive autonomy.

Policy profile

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Affordable Health Care^{3,4}

- California adopted Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). As a result, 13.4 million Californians are covered by Medicaid/CHIP, a 73% increase since 2013.
- The uninsured rate for Black people in California is 6.1%; the national average uninsured rate for Black people is 9.7%.
- The state Medicaid program has opted to use state funds to cover undocumented immigrants who meet the income requirements; children from birth through age 18 are covered with family income levels up to 266% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), including undocumented immigrant children.

Abortion Rights^{5,6}

- California state law constitutionally protects both abortion and contraception rights but generally prohibits abortion at viability. Exemptions can be past viability in cases of the life and health of the mother being in danger.

- California provides public funding for abortion care and requires private insurance coverage of abortion.
- There were an estimated 23 procedures for every 1,000 women in 2023.

Family Planning Services^{7,8}

- Californians of any age can buy over-the-counter emergency contraception (EC) without a prescription. Teens can get a prescription for birth control without a parent's permission.
- California has a policy in place that requires emergency rooms to provide EC or information about EC to rape survivors.
- California has secured a waiver or state plan amendment from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to cover family planning services under Medicaid, based solely on income criteria of 205% FPL.

Sexual Health Education⁷

- California state law does require public schools to provide comprehensive sexual health education in grades 7 to 12, but a school can choose to offer sex ed earlier than grade 7.
- Sexual health education must include information about the effectiveness and safety of contraceptive methods and does not teach abstinence-only-until-marriage.
- California law requires instruction about gender, gender expression, gender identity, and gender stereotypes.
- Students do not need permission of parents or guardians to participate in classes, but parents or guardians can opt their child out.

SYSTEMIC DISPARITIES

Maternal and Infant Mortality⁹⁻¹²

- The maternal mortality rate in California was 10.5 deaths for every 100,000 live births, lower than the national rate of 19 deaths/100,000 births. The gap between the mortality rate for Black women and white women in the US continues to grow, with Black women dying at a rate nearly 3.5 times higher.
- California has about 70 pregnancy-related deaths per year, one of the lowest in the country. The majority (80%) of those deaths were deemed to be preventable.
- The Black infant mortality rate in California is 9 deaths for every 1,000 live births; the U.S. rate is 10.4/1,000 live births. For Hispanic infants in California, the rate is 4.4/1,000 live births. For whites, the rate is 2.7/1,000, which is lower than the overall state rate of 4.1/1,000 births.

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STDs, Including HIV/AIDS¹³

- Of the total new diagnoses of STD/STIs in 2023 for which race/ethnicity was reported in California:
 - » There were 1293 new diagnoses of Syphilis: 13% were among Black women, 34% were among Hispanic women, 36% were among white women, and 2% were among Asian women.
 - » There were 113,185 new diagnoses of Chlamydia: 5% were among Black women, 20% were among Hispanic women, 11% were among white women, and 2% were among Asian women.
 - » There were 19,738 new diagnoses of Gonorrhea: 13% were among Black women, 26% were among Hispanic women, 17% were among white women, and 2% were among Asian women.
- Among women who received an HIV diagnosis in California in 2023 for whom race/ethnicity was known, 20% were Black women, 45% were Hispanic women, 26% were white women, 5% were Asian women, and 2% were multiracial.
- In 2023, of the AIDS-related deaths among women in California, 29% were Black women, 32% were Hispanic women, 25% were white women, and 12% were multiracial.

Reproductive Cancers^{13,14}

- In California, the age-adjusted rate of new breast cancer cases is 125.9 cancers for every 100,000 women. The rate for Black women is 129.2 for every 100,000 women; for Hispanic women, the rate is 102.6; for white women, the rate is 138.2
- The breast cancer mortality rate for Black women in California is 27.4 deaths for every 100,000 women, compared to 20.6 per 100,000 for white women. The rate for Hispanic women is 14.6
- The age-adjusted cervical cancer rate is 7.2 cases for every 100,000 women in California. The rate for Black women is 5.5 per 100,000 women and for Hispanic women is 9.7, compared to 5.8 for white women.

- The cervical cancer mortality rate for Black women is 2.7 deaths for every 100,000 women and for Hispanic women is 2.6, compared to 1.7 per 100,000 for white women.

Economic Justice^{15,16}

- In California, Black women make 61 cents for every dollar that a white man makes, creating a wage gap of 39 cents.
- The lifetime wage gap for Black women in California is \$1,588,200; a Black woman has to work until age 86 to make what a white man does by age 60.
- In California, 28.1% of women-headed households live in poverty. Among Black women, 19.6% live in poverty, compared to 12.5% of all women aged 18 and older, and 10.3% white women in the state.

LGBTQIA+ Liberation¹⁷

- California does not ban best practice medical care for transgender youth.
- There are state laws in place that explicitly prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity with respect to employment, housing, public accommodations, and credit and lending policies.
- State law protects LGBTQIA+ parents with respect to adoption or foster care; state family leave laws include LGBTQIA+-inclusive definitions of “spouse” or “partner,” or “children/parents.”
- California explicitly defines “sex” throughout state law to exclude transgender people.

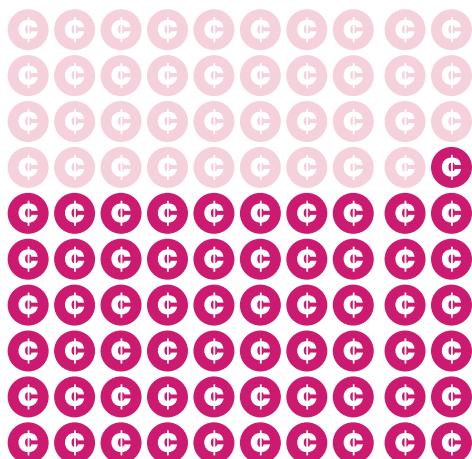
Criminal Justice¹⁸⁻²¹

- Black individuals comprise 28% of the prison population, compared to just 5% of the overall state population.
- Black individuals are 9.2 times more likely than white individuals in California to be incarcerated.
- California denies the right to vote to more than 27,000 Black citizens due to imprisonment for a felony conviction.
- California has anti-shackling legislation that protects pregnant inmates.

Violence Against Women²²⁻²⁵

- More than half (58%) of women in California and 30% of men have experienced some form of domestic violence in their lifetimes.
- Black women were 6 times as likely to die by gun homicide than white women in California.
- In 2022, there were at least 152 domestic violence-related homicides in California; 53% were by firearm.
- California does have ERPO (Extreme Risk Protection Order) laws.
- Since 2015, 66 women have been killed by police in California; 11 of those were Black women.

CALIFORNIA'S WAGE GAP



BLACK WOMEN MAKE **61 CENTS** FOR EVERY \$1.00 A WHITE MAN MAKES, A WAGE GAP OF **39 CENTS**.

National Women's Law Center. *Lifetime Wage Gap Losses by State for Black Women* February 2025. Accessed August 26, 2025. <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Lifetime-Losses-State-by-State-Black-Women-2.12.2025.pdf>

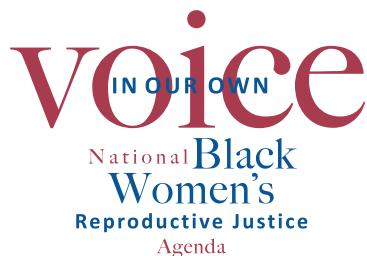
- Black women in California have a notably higher rate of asthma (14.3%) than the general state average (8.8%).
- Many of the reproductive cancers noted above have direct links to environmental pollution, and it is well-documented that racial and ethnic minorities and low-income groups often live in neighborhoods near hazardous waste and are disproportionately burdened with environmental pollution.

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Endnotes

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We are a national partnership focused on lifting up the voices of Black women leaders at the national, regional, and state level in our ongoing policy fight to secure Reproductive Justice for all women and girls.



IN OUR OWN VOICE:
NATIONAL BLACK WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE AGENDA
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Strategic Partners



New Voices for
Reproductive Justice



SPARK RJ Now!



SisterReach



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Black Women for
Wellness



Black Women's
Health Imperative



Wisdom Institute



The Afiya Center



New Jersey Black
Women Physicians
Association



Oshun Family Center



Women With A Vision



Birth in Color RVA

Because the Reproductive Justice framework encompasses bodily integrity and autonomy, our use of the term "women" includes cis, femmes, trans, agender, gender non-binary, and gender non-confirming individuals.