

The State of Black Women & Reproductive Justice

PENNSYLVANIA

Pennsylvania has a population of 13 million people, making it the 5th-most populous state in the United States.

About eleven percent (10.7%) of the population is Black (compared to 14.4% nationally); 75% of the population is white; 8.4% is Hispanic; 4.46% is Asian; and .2% is American Indians and/or Alaska Native.¹

Legislative profile ²

- Governor Josh Shapiro (D) supports reproductive autonomy.
- The Pennsylvania State House supports reproductive autonomy.
- The Pennsylvania State Senate opposes reproductive autonomy.

Policy profile

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE ^{3,4}

Affordable Health Care

- Pennsylvania adopted Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). As a result, 3.1 million people are covered by Medicaid/CHIP, down from 3.7 million in 2023.
- The uninsured rate for Black people in Pennsylvania is 7.8%. The national average uninsured rate for Black people is 9.7%.
- The state Medicaid program includes expanded coverage of services for 12 months post-partum for those making less than 220% of the Federal Poverty Level.

Abortion Rights ⁵⁻⁷

- Pennsylvania law prohibits abortion at 23 weeks, 6 days of pregnancy. Pennsylvania does not include express legal protections for abortion. Exceptions after that point may include when abortion care is needed to save the pregnant person's life or to prevent serious risk to the pregnant person's physical health.

- Pennsylvania requires a pregnant person to get counseling information from a provider and then wait 24 hours before getting abortion care.
- If the pregnant person is under 18, a parent or legal guardian must give permission for abortion care.
- Public funding of abortion care is limited to procedures that are necessary to prevent the death of the pregnant person or when the pregnancy resulted from rape or incest.
- The state's abortion rate in 2022 was 14.2 procedures for every 1,000 women.

Family Planning Services ^{8,9}

- Pennsylvanians of any age can buy over-the-counter emergency contraception (EC) without a prescription.
- Pennsylvania requires emergency rooms to provide EC or information about EC to rape survivors.
- Pennsylvania has secured a waiver or state plan amendment from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to cover family planning services under Medicaid, based solely on income criteria of 209% of the Federal Poverty Level.

Sexual Health Education ⁸

- Pennsylvania state law does not require public schools to provide sexual health education. Pennsylvania does require schools to provide education on sexually transmitted diseases and infections (STDs/STIs) and HIV/AIDS.
- If they provide sexual health education, the materials must be age-appropriate and stress the benefits of abstaining from sex.
- Students do not need permission of parents or guardians to participate in classes, but parents or guardians can opt their child out.

SYSTEMIC DISPARITIES

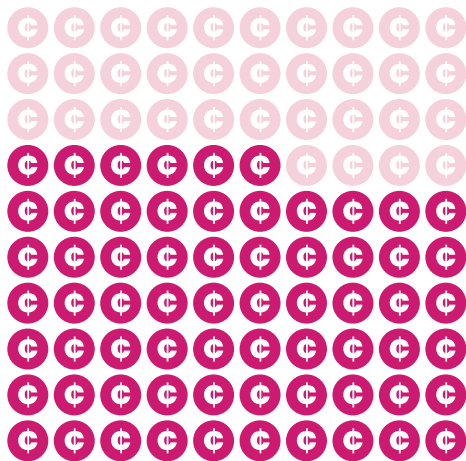
Maternal and Infant Mortality ¹⁰⁻¹³

- The maternal mortality rate in Pennsylvania was 17.5 deaths for every 100,000 live births, slightly 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.
- There were 83 pregnancy-associated deaths in Pennsylvania in 2020. The vast majority (93.5%) of those deaths were deemed to be preventable. The overall pregnancy-associated mortality ratio was 82 deaths/100,000 live births. Black women had the highest ratio (148/100,000 live births), which was much higher than that of white women (81). Hispanic women had a ratio of 42 deaths/100,000 live births.
- The Black infant mortality rate in Pennsylvania is 9.6 deaths for every 1,000 live births; the U.S. rate is 10.4/1,000 live births. For whites, the rate is 4.5/1,000, which equals the national rate. Hispanic infants had a rate of 6.91/1,000, higher than the national rate of 5.0.

STDs, Including HIV/AIDS¹⁴

- Of the total new diagnoses of STD/STIs in 2023 for which race/ethnicity was reported in Pennsylvania:
 - » There were 266 new diagnoses of Syphilis: 44% were among Black women, 28% were among white women, and 16% were among Hispanic women.
 - » There were 33,894 new diagnoses of Chlamydia: 36% were among Black women, 26% were among white women, and 17% were among Hispanic women.

PENNSYLVANIA'S WAGE GAP



BLACK WOMEN MAKE **66 CENTS**
FOR EVERY \$1.00 A WHITE MAN MAKES,
A WAGE GAP OF **34 CENTS**.

Source: 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>

Among women who received an HIV diagnosis in Pennsylvania in 2023 for whom race/ethnicity was known, 55% were Black women and 24% were white women.

» There were 7,283 new diagnoses of Gonorrhea: 50% were among Black women, 21% were among white women, and 13% were among Hispanic women.

- Among women who received an HIV diagnosis in Pennsylvania in 2023 for whom race/ethnicity was known, 55% were Black women, 24% were white women, 16% were Hispanic women, and 3% were multiracial women.
- In 2023, of the AIDS-related deaths among women in Pennsylvania, 39% were Black women, 16% were white women, 12% were Hispanic women, and 6% were multiracial women.

Reproductive Cancers^{14,15}

- In Pennsylvania, the age-adjusted rate of new breast cancer cases is 135.1 cancers for every 100,000 women. The rate for Black women is 123.4 for every 100,000 women; for white women, the rate is 138.7 and for Hispanic women the rate is 98.6.
- The breast cancer mortality rate for Black women in Pennsylvania is 25.7 deaths for every 100,000 women, compared to 18.8 per 100,000 for white women and 12.5 per 100,000 for Hispanic women.
- The age-adjusted cervical cancer rate is 6.8 cases for every 100,000 women in Pennsylvania. The rate for Black women is 5.9 per 100,000 women, compared to 6.8 for white women. The rate for Hispanic women is 8.6 per 100,000 women.
- The cervical cancer mortality rate for Black women is 2.9 deaths for every 100,000 women, compared to 1.7 per 100,000 for white women. The rate for Hispanic women is 4.4 per 100,000.

Economic Justice^{16,17}

- In Pennsylvania, Black women make 66 cents for every dollar that a white man makes, creating a wage gap of 34 cents.
- The lifetime wage gap for Black women in Pennsylvania is \$978,880; a Black woman has to work until age 81 to make what a white man does by age 60.

- In Pennsylvania, 33.3% of women-headed households live in poverty. Among Black women, 22.8% live in poverty, compared to 12.6% of all women aged 18 and older and 10% of white women.

LGBTQIA+ Liberation^{18,19}

- Pennsylvania 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; there is no state law that prohibits discrimination in credit and lending policies.
- No state law protects LGBTQIA+ parents with respect to adoption or foster care; state family leave laws do not include LGBTQIA+-inclusive definitions of "spouse" or "partner," or "children/parents."
- Pennsylvania explicitly defines "sex" throughout state law to exclude transgender people.

Criminal Justice²⁰⁻²³

- Black individuals comprise 46% of the prison population, compared to just 11% of the overall state population.
- Black individuals are 7.7 times more likely than white individuals in Pennsylvania to be incarcerated.
- Black Pennsylvanians are excluded from voting at almost 8 times the rate of non-Black Pennsylvanians. Pennsylvania denies the right to vote to 41,000 citizens due to imprisonment for a felony conviction.
- Pennsylvania has anti-shackling legislation that protects pregnant inmates.

Violence Against Women²⁴⁻²⁶

- More than half (51.4%) of women in Pennsylvania and 25.7% of men have experienced some form of domestic violence in their lifetimes.
- In 2021, 112 people were killed in domestic violence homicides in Pennsylvania. More than half (56%) were killed by a partner or former intimate partner; 63% of the deaths were committed with a firearm.
- State law prohibits people who have been convicted of misdemeanor or domestic violence crimes from possessing firearms. Protection from abuse orders can also require removal of firearms from the offender.
- Since 2015, 10 women have been killed by police in Pennsylvania; 4 of those were Black women.

Environmental Justice²⁷⁻²⁹

- Black people in Pennsylvania have a higher rate of asthma (10.4%) than white Pennsylvanians (9.4%).
- Black women in Pennsylvania have a notably higher rate of asthma (15.3%) than the general state average (10.3%).
- 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.

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
202.545.7660 • www.blackrj.org

Strategic Partners



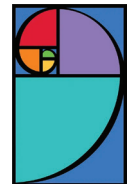
New Voices for
Reproductive Justice



SPARK RJ Now!



SisterReach



SisterLove



Black Women for
Wellness



Black Women's
Health Imperative



Wisdom Institute



The Afiya Center



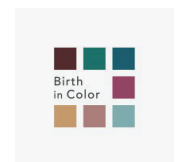
New Jersey Black
Women Physicians
Association



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.