

SNAPSHOT

Undiagnosed cognitive impairment rates are high

DECEMBER 13, 2024

As the U.S. population ages, cognitive impairment and dementia are increasing. Rates of cognitive impairment vary by income and race, and marginalized populations frequently receive a later diagnosis. *Harvard Public Health* spoke with Ambar Kulshreshtha, associate professor of family and preventive medicine at Emory University, about a recent study on testing for cognitive impairment at federally qualified health centers.

Why study this topic?

Dementia prevention is not just about memory but also about preserving the independence and dignity of our patients.

Dementia affects not only their personal and family lives but also their caregivers. With the availability of disease-modifying drugs for Alzheimer's and the opportunity for lifestyle modification, the sooner we can diagnose these patients, the sooner we can put them on a path to better brain health.

What did you find?

We found 62.3 percent of people over age 65 had undiagnosed mild cognitive impairment, 12.3 percent had dementia, and only 25.5 percent had no cognitive

impairment. Black individuals had more than double the odds of White individuals of having a diagnosis. The prevalence of undiagnosed cognitive impairment in the community could be higher because patients who are plugged in to primary care are different from people who do not have access to primary care.

What would you like to see happen based on the study's results?

We need more targeted interventions for communities at high risk, so people are not diagnosed at late stages when the treatment options are limited. Health care providers can emphasize brain health in routine visits and offer culturally sensitive resources to reduce stigma and encourage people to seek screening. Some health care systems are piloting digital screening tools embedded in their electronic health systems, but more needs to be done.

—*Sarah Muthler*

(Study in *JAMA Network Open* (<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2825211>), October 2024)

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