

## **Cancer in African American Women: Key Points**

### **Vital Statistics and Social Indicators**

- There are approximately 34.7 million African Americans in the United States—Blacks thus comprise about 12 percent of the total U.S. population.
- There are about 15.3 million African American adult women in the United States.
- Compared to U.S. women overall, African Americans are relatively young, have large families, are less educated and more likely to be living in poverty, and are disproportionately living in single-parent households.
- African Americans, especially those who are poor, are less likely than Whites to have a usual source of health care.

### **Cancer Rates, Mortality, and Risk Factors**

- Overall age-adjusted cancer incidence rates for African American women are lower than those for Whites, though African Americans have higher age-adjusted incidence rates for several sites.
- Breast, lung, and colon-rectum cancers are among the most commonly diagnosed cancer cases in African American women.
- Cancer survival rates are lower overall for African American women than for Whites, and mortality for colorectal, lung, breast, and cervical cancers are among those that are relatively highest.
- Although the mortality trends among African American women for most cancers showed decreases during the 1990s, the proportional decreases were less than for White women.
- Major cancer risk factors for African American women include: tobacco use, poor diet, obesity, and inadequate screening for cervical and breast cancer.
- Disparities in cancer outcomes for African American women are explained in part by later stage at diagnosis, but also appear to result from less aggressive treatment.

### **Data Limitations and Future Directions**

- Cancer data on African American women are among the best available for minority racial groups, but it may be important to stratify the data by socioeconomic status to help untangle the effects of factors such as race, lesser education, and poverty.
- Recent cancer prevention studies have shown that culturally sensitive interventions that involve African American communities can improve cancer screening and improve dietary habits.
- Cooperation between health providers, the government, and African American communities can further improve cancer outcomes among African American women.