

AUDIENCE PROFILE: AFRICAN AMERICANS

12.7%

12.7% of African American 18 and older have diabetes. (1)

36%

36% of African Americans have prediabetes. Of those with prediabetes only 10.5% are aware of that they have the disease.

40.7 M

African Americans make up 12.7% of the nation's total population. (2)



Ten states with the highest African American population.

- Texas
- Florida
- Georgia
- New York
- California
- North Carolina
- Illinois
- Maryland
- Virginia
- Louisiana



In order to successfully engage your target audience, you must have a clear understanding of their culture, beliefs and barriers to health. This audience profile includes information about the cultural nuances that need to be considered when reaching African Americans, based on the review of various research studies and also taking into consideration lessons learned through past experiences working with this population. This document is not an in-depth research report or analysis, as it is meant to help you have a general understanding of different factors that may affect your audience's availability, interest and/or commitment to your program. Use the questions listed at the end of this profile to validate and expand on the information provided for your local program's market.

Understanding African American Audiences

African American audiences represent a blend of cultures and traditions that reflect their diversity, rich history and ongoing ethnic adaptations. The population incorporates cultural influence from Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, Europe and North America. Over time, the audience has collected these influences and created a unique culture that is ever-evolving, and both forward-thinking and reflective.

Geographic Location

In July 2015, 40.7 million people in the United States identified as African American, which represents 12.7 percent of the total population. African Americans are the second largest minority population, following the Hispanic/Latino population. In 2015, most African Americans lived in the South (58 percent of the African American U.S. population), while 35 percent of the Caucasian population lived in the South. African American remigration to the South continues, affecting culture and economics across the African-American community.

Africans, Blacks, and African Americans: As the U.S. African American population grows, so does its diversity. Since 1980, the number of Black immigrants has more than quadrupled, reaching a record 3.8 million living in the U.S. today. Black immigrants now account for 8.7 percent of the nation's African American population, or one in every 11 African Americans. While 50 percent of Black immigrants are from the Caribbean, immigrants from Africa are driving recent growth. African immigrants now account for more than a third (36 percent) of the total foreign-born U.S. African American population. Nigeria and Ethiopia are the African countries with the greatest numbers of immigrants arriving in the U.S. Smaller growth is also coming from European countries. (2)

Characteristics and Cultural Understanding

African American consumers, particularly women, are increasingly resisting perceived Western views of health, beauty, fitness and levels of success. According to Forbes, the notion of being African American and a woman is having a key moment in society, between black girl magic and black lives matter. Investments are being made to support and shape African American consumerism, which is largely driven by the idea that African American women influence the shopping habits and purchases of their peers. (5)

Socializing is very important in the African-American community. Annual events such as family reunions, cultural festivals and alumni gatherings connect African Americans in a unique way that focuses on fellowship and is cross-generational. (2)

With the increase in and access to research about ancestry and familial relationships to Africa, African Americans, age 45-64, are more interested in reflecting their connection to Africa. (2)

Reaching African American Men (6):

- It is important to attend to race and masculinity when developing interventions for African American men
- Culturally- inspired practices (e.g., reliance on home remedies, mistrust of physicians) might lead men to ignore health screening opportunities and preventive health care
- Approach to reach African American men should include messaging that encourages them to first consider impact of their health on the family and their ability to fulfill gender roles—as protector and provider

Black immigrants are a diverse group with significant differences in demographic, economic and geographic characteristics. These characteristics are often tied to the country of their birth. Black immigrants are more likely than other immigrants to hold U.S. citizenship with 54 percent having achieved this status. Nearly ¾ of Black immigrants are proficient in English. They are more likely to have a college degree or to be married than U.S.-born African Americans. Black immigrants primarily live in the Northeast and South. (3)

Economic Implications

African-American consumers are making gains and upending outdated stereotypes on multiple fronts from education to income to social media and civic

engagement—becoming increasingly affluent, influential and culturally diverse.

According to a 2015 Census Bureau report, the average African American household median income was \$36,515 in comparison to \$61,394 for Caucasian households. In 2015, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that 25.4 percent of African Americans in comparison to 10.4 percent of Caucasians were living at the poverty level. For 2015, the unemployment rate for African Americans was twice that for Caucasians (11.4 percent and 5.0 percent, respectively). This finding was consistent for both men and women. (1)

However, according to a 2016 article in The Atlantic and research from the University of Georgia's Selig Center for Economic Growth, African American buying power was projected to reach \$1.2 trillion in 2016 and \$1.4 trillion by 2020. In 1990, African American buying power was \$320 billion, meaning it has grown 275 percent in the last few decades. The report shows that African-American consumers represent the largest consumer color group in the marketplace. (5)

Education and Its Impact on Health Literacy

In 2015, as compared to Caucasians 25 years and over, a lower percentage of African Americans had earned at least a high school diploma (84.8 percent and 92.3 percent, respectively). 20.2 percent of African Americans have a bachelor's degree or higher, as compared with 34.2 percent of Caucasians. More African American women than African American men had earned at least a bachelor's degree (22.4 percent compared with 17.7 percent), while among Caucasians, a higher proportion of men than women had earned at least a bachelor's degree (34.4 percent and 34.0 percent, respectively). (1) Lower levels of educational attainment means the following is necessary for maximum outreach effectiveness:

- Use plain language to explain scientific terms
- Explain data with social math
- Use culturally-relevant, relatable examples
- Confirm understanding through repeated affirmation
- Provide relatable messengers when possible (same ethnicity, same gender, same age range)
- Use graphics and images

Health Behavior and Information Seeking

Faith-based settings are key to African-American community life, particularly among older and Southern African Americans. Health conversations starting in and centered on faith are well-received and acted upon. African American churches often break down barriers imposed by age and socioeconomic status.

African-American consumers' buying patterns showcase a focus on family and cooking ingredients tied to cultural traditions. There is an expectation for the brands purchased to reflect certain social values: 40 percent of African Americans expect brands to support social causes. (2)

Sharing experiences and social networking is fundamental to the African-American community. In today's digital age, online social networks have become the virtual gathering forum to exchange ideas, feelings, aspirations and plans. African Americans have become leaders in expressing their feelings and advancing their causes through social networks by becoming their own authors—sharing news and bringing wide-spread awareness to social issues and trends. (2)

African Americans appreciate group-specific statistics that are not only race-specific, but also exact and not generalized, thereby indicating strong, reliable, and trustworthy research. It is important to validate information and create marketing tools that speak to the local community you are working in. Statements about health issues should not compare African Americans to other races/ethnicities; that may indicate that one is better than the other or focus on health disparities versus behavior change among the target audience.

Trusted Sources and Influencers

- Trusted sources of health-related information for women comes from physicians, media, and health/medical-related associations, but they were skeptical of the information if it differed from their own personal experience. Addressing health and health outcomes in the current political climate often is cast under the shadow of access to care, access to quality care, and health insurance coverage. (4) Health disparities and health as a social justice issue predominant messaging.
- While many African Americans trust information from physicians, for some there is a history of mistrust, and are more inclined to listen to family members. In multigenerational households, older

mothers and grandmothers carry great weight and influence on family health decisions.

- Adult African American daughters are great resources for health information for men. Men often will follow health advice of their “baby girl” over other sources of information, including their wives/partners.
- Nurses and nursing professionals and paraprofessionals abound in the African-American community. Family members rely on them to provide health information and wellness counsel. Family members often call the nurse in the family to discuss health crises before consulting physicians.

Media Habits

African Americans are widely recognized as avid consumers of all media types, particularly television, music and social media. The year 2015, however, represented a tipping point for African Americans, as their media consumption, powerful cultural influence and burgeoning population growth drove unprecedented impact across consumer industries and civic issues. (2)

Digital

African Americans are digital influencers. They're more likely to use smartphones, and African American older Gen Xers and young Boomers are more likely to post to social media while watching live TV. From “Black Twitter” to #IfHogwartsWasAnHBCU, social media should be considered in reaching them. But authenticity is key. Social sites for favorites—media outlets, personalities (media, celebrities, athletes, musicians, actors/actresses), social conscious-raisers are key influencers. In addition, for educated African Americans, social alumni groups, university sites and fraternity/sorority groups are important influencers.

African-American consumers are adroit and well-informed commentators who are making their voices heard, and in many cases, defining and leading the national conversation on important social issues. (2)

Radio

A full 91 percent of all African Americans, or 31 million, listen to the radio weekly. African Americans listen to more radio than the total population at all age levels, particularly in the youngest and the Boomer age ranges: 12-17 (+11 percent more) and 50-64 (+9 percent more). African Americans also listen to the radio more

than any race or ethnic group, at over 60 hours per month. Afternoon drive-time, Monday - Friday, 3 p.m. to 7 p.m., is the top listening daypart for African Americans. (2)

- African-American radio, particularly syndicated shows like Steve Harvey, Michael Baisden, Rickey Smiley, Tom Joyner and Joe Madison on XM/Sirius
- Faith-based radio is popular with older, African American women, particularly Yolanda Adams Morning Show
- Sports talk radio is popular with older African American men
- Blues and gospel stations are most popular among older African Americans in the Deep South

Considerations for Messaging

- **Cultural relevance.** Make sure that outreach coordinators/lifestyle coaches look like or sound like the African American targets. If they do not exude cultural sensitivity in language, demeanor or understanding, the audience will not connect with them and the message may not get across.
- **Cultural bias.** Resistance to behavior change that seems to promote perceived Western standards of wellness, diet, beauty and fitness. African Americans have high rates of overweight and obesity that is often tied to traditional African and Southern style cuisine of fried foods and simple carbohydrates that contribute to obesity. Also, many African Americans believe that eating large portions and having a larger body is a sign of success, status and beauty. Food insecurity and residency in a food desert may affect the ability to find fresh fruits and vegetables in their community. And safety concerns and/or cost may affect African Americans' ability to exercise outside or in an organized fitness facility/gym.
- **Complacency and Fatalism.** Most African American families have relatives and/or close friends with diabetes; diabetes is common and seen as a way of life. Many African Americans are complacent about a diabetes diagnosis or potential for prevention. (6)
- **Distrust in Federal government.** African Americans' level of distrust of Federal government health programs continues to escalate.

- **Skepticism.** Belief that nothing is free and/or if it is free it must be inferior.

Proven Strategies

- **Faith based outreach.** Engage local churches to share health information and pre-diabetes and diabetes education. Enlist local churches to help recruit program participants. Consider holding sessions at churches to facilitate access and ensure a trusted and safe environment for your audience.
- **Focus on women.** African American women are the family health gatekeepers. In addition, many may also have prediabetes. Appeal to the women's caregiving nature and encourage them to help get the entire family involved in healthier living.
- **Ensure cultural relevancy.** Tailor healthy behavior activities to address food deserts, diet preferences and the ability to move more. Recommending participants drastically change their diets and cut out food favorites is not likely to be effective. Look for modifications instead that audiences can embrace. Use materials and examples that reflect the African-American community to ensure they can relate to and accept the messages. And when possible, employ a great number of lifestyle coaches who are members of the audience you are trying to reach.
- **Leverage community and family.** African American "family" may include fellow church members, sorority sisters, best friends, old college roommates, close neighbors, as well as blood relatives. Engaging members of one "family" fosters an environment for trusted motivators and support to maximize success.
- **Promote your program with radio.** Radio works. Engage local African American radio stations and station personalities to promote your program, share stories of success and communicate the benefits of the program.

Questions for Consideration

Understanding Your African American Population

- What are the demographics of your local African American population?

Demographics	Statistic/Data
Population Percentage	
Median Age	
Gender	
Country of Origin	
Language (spoken)	
Population with Prediabetes	
Economic Status	

- What are the cultural and language nuances for the local African-American community?
- Within your community, are there particularly active or large groups that represent African Americans?

Health Care and Health Information Seeking Behaviors

- Where does the local African American population go for health care? Be specific.
- How accessible is health care within the community, especially for African Americans?
- Are the health information seeking behaviors the same or different for the local African American population compared to other populations within the community? If different, how?
- Who are the trusted sources for health information for your local African American population? Are they different or the same as other trusted sources?

Trusted Sources

- Who are the trusted thought leaders in your local community?
 - Community Based Organizations?
 - Faith Communities?
 - Health Care Providers?
 - Vocal advocates?
- Who has access to these groups? With whom do you need to collaborate?
- How can you utilize these trusted sources to help you with marketing and promoting your lifestyle change program?

Media Habits

- Which media channels, including social and digital media, are most popular and/or preferred among African Americans in your community?
- What relationships do you have with these media outlets? Who do you need to reach out to?
- What infrastructure does your organization have to utilize popular social and digital channels? What do you need to strengthen?

Messages

- Are your messages culturally sensitive?
- Do you have images that will resonate with your local African American population?
- Are you working with community organizations or groups that will be able to assist with message development for your marketing materials?

Barriers and Benefits to the National DPP

- What are the specific barriers in your community?
- How will you work to mitigate these?
- What benefits are meaningful to your audience? How can you work these benefits into your marketing materials?
- What does your lifestyle change program offer the community that other prevention programs or events don't or can't?

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