

# Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Obesity, Diet, and Physical Activity in the United States

In the United States, decades of structural inequities and social injustices have contributed to adverse differences in social determinants of health, such as education, housing, employment, and financial security, all of which are factors that influence a person's behaviors related to diet, physical activity, and general wellness. As a result, there are considerable disparities in the quality of diet, physical activity, and obesity\* among certain segments of the U.S. population:

## OBESITY

- Among adults, **prevalence of obesity is higher among Black women** (57 percent) compared to White women (40 percent).
- Among **youth ages 10 to 17**:
  - **Obesity rates are significantly higher for those who are non-Hispanic Black** (23.8 percent), **Hispanic** (21.4 percent), or **non-Hispanic American Indian/Alaska Native** (28.7 percent), compared to those who are non-Hispanic White (12.1 percent) or non-Hispanic Asian (8.1 percent);
  - **Obesity rates** were 8.6 percent in the highest income group versus **23.1 percent in the lowest income group**.
- The **prevalence of obesity is significantly higher among U.S. adults living in rural counties** (34.2 percent) compared to those living in urban counties (28.7 percent).



## DIET

- In **Philadelphia, PA**, the sixth most populous city in the United States, neighborhoods with the lowest median income have **28 percent fewer stores with healthier foods per capita** compared to places with the highest median income; more people living in areas with an overabundance of unhealthy food are Black (45 percent) compared to White (27 percent).
- Between 2013 and 2016, **consumption of unhealthy “fast food” was higher among Black adults** (42 percent) compared to White (37 percent), Hispanic (36 percent) and Asian (31 percent) adults.



## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

- The **prevalence of physical inactivity is higher among people with less than a high school education** (48.2 percent) compared to those who are college graduates (14.5 percent).
- **Hispanic adults** (32.1 percent) have the **highest prevalence of physical inactivity**, followed by non-Hispanic Black adults (30 percent) compared to non-Hispanic White adults (23%).



\* Overweight and obesity are often assessed using BMI: BMI between 18.5 and 24.9 is considered healthy weight. However, it must be noted that the use of BMI has limitations as it is not an accurate measure of obesity or body fatness for all individuals. For example, Asian individuals may have increased health risks at a lower BMI.