



# Congress: Adopt solutions to end minority health disparities

BY FOLUSO FAKORDE, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR — 04/18/19 08:40 AM EDT  
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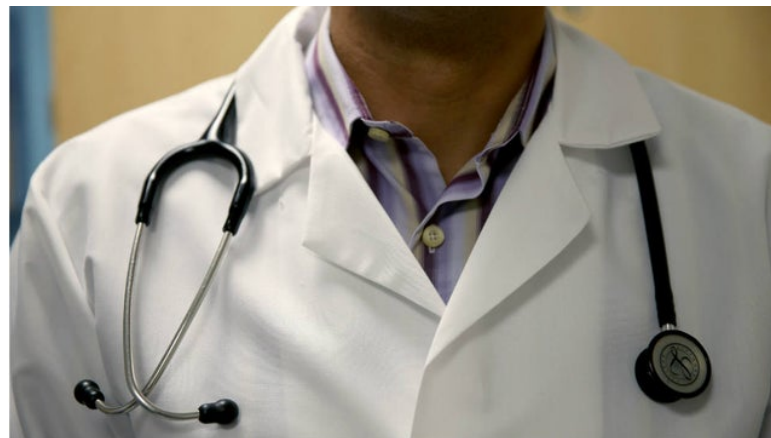
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As a physician on the frontlines of an overlooked epidemic, I've seen countless patients who have had no choice but to have their limbs surgically amputated because they didn't have access to the clinical interventions that could have saved their legs.

No, I don't work in a developing country. I'm a doctor in the Mississippi Delta.

Despite living in the world's richest country—a nation that spends twice as much on health care as any other – many minority communities in the U.S. suffer disproportionately from chronic diseases that wreak havoc on lives and limbs.

Since April is [National Minority Health Month](#), now is the perfect time to reflect on the inequities facing millions of Americans, as well as how we can collectively pave the path for building stronger, healthier communities.

Each year, roughly [200,000 Americans – about 548 each day – will have their limbs amputated because of non-traumatic causes](#) like peripheral artery disease (PAD). Never heard of PAD before? Neither have many of my patients until it is too late.

PAD occurs when fatty deposits in the arteries restrict the blood flow to the limbs, resulting in pain in the legs, poor healing of diabetic ulcers, gangrene, and eventual amputation. An all-too-common complication of diabetes, PAD is a risk for the over 30 million Americans living with

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diabetes and 84.1 million living with prediabetes. Unfortunately, minority communities are most at risk: according to the American Diabetes Association, [African Americans are 1.7 times more likely than non-Hispanic whites to have diabetes](#).

It is no wonder then that PAD disproportionately impacts minority populations most severely. Data show that [African-American patients with diabetes are nearly four times more likely to have their limbs surgically removed than whites](#). Similar trends exist for Native Americans in the West and Hispanics, who are twice as likely and 75 percent more likely, respectively, to suffer from PAD than their Caucasian counterparts. Tragically, even higher rates are seen for minorities living in my home state of Mississippi, which is the epicenter of the PAD epidemic.

This increased prevalence is further compounded by lack of access to quality care. Even though early screening and treatment can [reduce the probability of an amputation by an estimated 90 percent](#), it is still extremely underutilized and far too many patients do not even realize they have PAD until the disease has progressed too far for intervention. According to [research from the Mayo Clinic](#), even though PAD is more prevalent than all cancers combined, PAD is diagnosed and treated in less than 25 percent of ALL affected patients.

Sadly, in the Mississippi Delta where I practice, more than 90 percent of the amputees I've met, most of whom are African American, have never had a diagnostic test for PAD or an appropriate vascular evaluation to salvage their limbs. When it comes to something as serious as amputation, where you live, your skin color, insurance status, or socioeconomic status should not determine whether or not your limb is saved – a phenomenon known as the “amputation lottery.”

As a limb salvage specialist and an African American, I am dedicated to serving not just my patients, but also the whole community. I have made it my mission to both help patients save their legs and influence policymakers to adopt smarter policies to help eliminate the painful PAD disparities that afflict communities of color.

I urge Congress to direct the administration to convene an Intragovernmental Workgroup on Amputation Reduction. Such a working group should focus on implementing three pillars for protecting patients most at risk of PAD. First, stronger policies must be enacted in order to increase at-risk patients' access to screening. To this end, the Department of Health and Human Services should work with the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) to develop screening protocols for our nation's most at-risk patients.

Second, multidisciplinary care must be a priority. Interprofessional Internet Consultation Codes in the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule could encourage multi-disciplinary teams to provide vascular evaluations to provide risk assessments and referral recommendations to underserved communities.

Finally, there must be no amputation without vascular evaluation. Policies should be implemented that require providers to document vascular evaluations in the 12 months prior to having patients undergo non-traumatic, non-emergent amputations. Failure to perform arterial testing should result in non-payment for the amputation from Medicare (and other payors).

By promoting policies that expand access to early detection, screening, and clinical interventions, we can successfully reduce amputations for our

most at-risk communities. No one should lose a limb when it can be saved.

*Foluso Fakorde, MD is a practicing interventional cardiologist and co-chair of the PAD Initiative for the Association of Black Cardiologists.*

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## Biden leads, Warren and Sanders tied for second in new poll

BY JONATHAN EASLEY - 07/19/19 09:03 AM EDT

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Former Vice President Joe Biden leads the field of Democratic presidential hopefuls, with Sens. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) and Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) tied for second place, according to a new national poll.

A survey released Friday from NBC News-Survey Monkey finds Biden at 25 percent support, a 9-point lead over Sanders and Warren, who are tied for second place with 16 percent support each. Sen. Kamala Harris (Calif.) is close behind, with 14 percent support.

The [NBC News-Survey Monkey online survey](#) was conducted in the two weeks following the first Democratic debate, between July 2 and July 16.

The results are in line with what most other recent polls have found. Biden maintains a significant but not insurmountable lead over the field.

Sanders has held steady in the front of the pack of candidates chasing Biden, while Warren and Harris have cemented their standing alongside him as top contenders for the nomination.

South Bend, Ind., Mayor Pete Buttigieg, who raised more money in the second quarter than any other candidate, is in fifth place at 8 percent in the poll. Former Rep. Beto O'Rourke (Texas), whose fundraising fell

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dramatically this quarter, is at 3 percent, along with Sen. Cory Booker (N.J.). Every other candidate is at 2 percent or less.

The survey also found President Trump's approval rating at 48 percent, up from 45 percent in September. Fifty-one percent of voters said they disapprove of the job Trump is doing, down from 54 percent.

According to data from Gallup, Trump posted the best average approval rating of his presidency in the second quarter of 2019 at 42.9 percent, beating his previous best of 41.9 percent. The latest Gallup survey found Trump's approval rating at 44 percent, down from his high of 46 percent in mid-April.

The NBC News-Survey Monkey poll does not fully account for Trump's latest racial controversy, in which he said four Democratic women of color should "go back" to other countries.

At a reelection rally last night in North Carolina, Trump ramped up his criticism, provoking the crowd to break into a chant of "send her back" in reference to Rep. Ilhan Omar (D-Minn.), a U.S. citizen from Somalia.

However, the poll found that Trump's focus on the migrant crisis at the southern border may be impacting public opinion. A plurality of voters, 22 percent, said immigration is the most important issue to them, up from 15 percent in the previous survey, followed by 21 percent who said health care and 21 percent who said jobs.

The NBC News-Survey Monkey poll of 13,533 registered voters was conducted online and has a 1.2 percentage point margin of error.

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