

# Understanding Atherosclerotic Cardiovascular Disease (ASCVD)

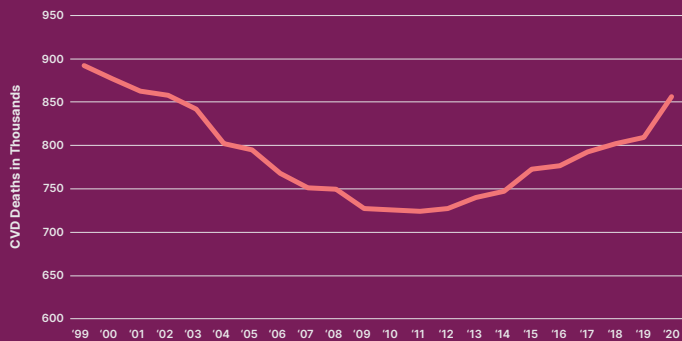


## The Burden of Cardiovascular Disease

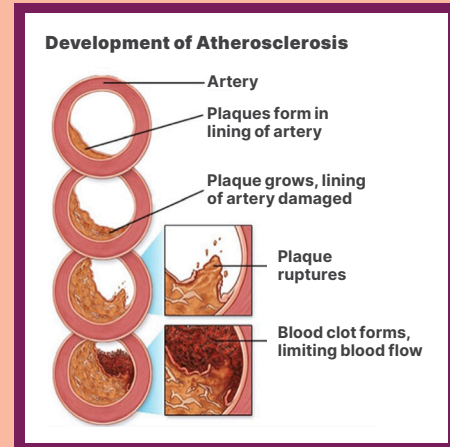
Cardiovascular disease (CVD), also known as heart disease, is a spectrum of conditions involving the heart and blood vessels. It is the number one cause of death in the United States, killing more people each year than all forms of cancer and accidents combined.<sup>1</sup>

Alarming, after decades of promising decline and advances in treatment, CVD prevalence is back on the rise – a trend that has been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, indicating a critical need to re-focus our efforts on prevention.<sup>2,3</sup>

CVD Deaths, United States, 1999-2020



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Leading Causes of Death Reports, 1981-2020. <https://wiscars.cdc.gov/fatal-leading> (Accessed December 2022). (Cardiovascular disease deaths estimated as the combined total of all "Heart Disease" deaths and all "Cerebrovascular" deaths for each year between 1999 and 2020)



Source: Mayo Clinic. Arteriosclerosis/atherosclerosis. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseasesconditions/arteriosclerosis-atherosclerosis/symptoms-causes/syc-20350569?p=1> (Accessed January 2023).

## What is ASCVD?

Atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease (ASCVD) is the most common and deadliest form of CVD.<sup>4</sup> ASCVD is caused by high levels of LDL-C, also known as "bad cholesterol," which builds up in the blood over time, impeding the flow of oxygenated blood.<sup>5</sup>

ASCVD is often a "silent" condition in that many patients may not experience any symptoms, especially in the earlier stages of the disease.<sup>6</sup> If left untreated, ASCVD can lead to severe outcomes, like heart attack, stroke, and death.<sup>7</sup>

## ASCVD By the Numbers

ASCVD care costs the U.S. economy roughly

**\$126B**

on direct medical expenses every year.<sup>8</sup>

**Over 22M Americans**

have been diagnosed with ASCVD, with potentially millions more undiagnosed.<sup>8</sup>

ASCVD is the deadliest form of CVD, resulting in over

**400K deaths**

each year.<sup>8</sup>

## ASCVD Risk Factors

Key risk factors for ASCVD include but are not limited to:

- Elevated LDL-C ("bad cholesterol")**
- High blood pressure**
- Smoking**

- Diabetes**
- Obesity**
- Physical inactivity**



While there is no cure for ASCVD, its progression can often be effectively managed through a **healthy lifestyle and appropriate use of medication**. Current evidence suggests that elevated LDL-C is the most readily modifiable risk factor through the use of statins and more advanced therapies.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the availability of effective treatments, **only 1 in 5 ASCVD patients** currently taking statins ever reach healthy, guideline-recommended levels of LDL-C.<sup>10</sup>

## Undertreatment of Risk Factors Contributes to Disparities in Outcomes Among Underserved Populations

Evidence suggests that barriers to appropriate care and treatment contribute to undertreatment of risk factors and disparities in cardiovascular outcomes among medically underserved populations, including racial and ethnic minorities, women, and rural communities.



Black Americans have the **highest death rate** associated with CVD.<sup>11</sup>



Black, Hispanic, and Asian Americans have **worse access to cholesterol-lowering treatment** than White Americans.<sup>12</sup>



Among those with ASCVD, **women are less likely than men** to report statin use, and report higher frequency of hospital emergency department visits.<sup>13</sup>



Rural Americans have **higher CVD prevalence** and higher rates of high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and diabetes than urban Americans.<sup>14</sup>

## Barriers to Care and Treatment Contribute to Poor Outcomes

Despite improved knowledge of risk factors and advances in new therapies, barriers to care and treatment hinder progress in reducing ASCVD deaths.



### Insurance Barriers:

Insurance policies such as prior authorization can lead to delays in care.



### Health Systems Barriers:

Policy barriers disincentivize value-based payment models that can help improve patient access to innovative treatments.



### Clinical Practice Barriers:

Current clinical guidelines do not prioritize treatment targets for patients with ASCVD.



### Socioeconomic Barriers:

Adverse social and economic conditions increase the burden of ASCVD risk factors.

## How States Can Help Tackle ASCVD

State legislatures can help raise awareness of the burden of ASCVD and lay the groundwork for other critical state-level policies that can improve access to care and treatment for vulnerable populations through the adoption of ASCVD-focused resolutions.



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### About Take Health to Heart

*Take Health to Heart* is an education and advocacy initiative of the [Foundation of the National Lipid Association](#) and the [National Medical Association](#). *Take Health to Heart* is made possible through a sponsorship from Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation. Learn more at [TakeHealthtoHeart.Org](https://www.TakeHealthtoHeart.Org).

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