

CHAPTER 1: THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF WOMEN

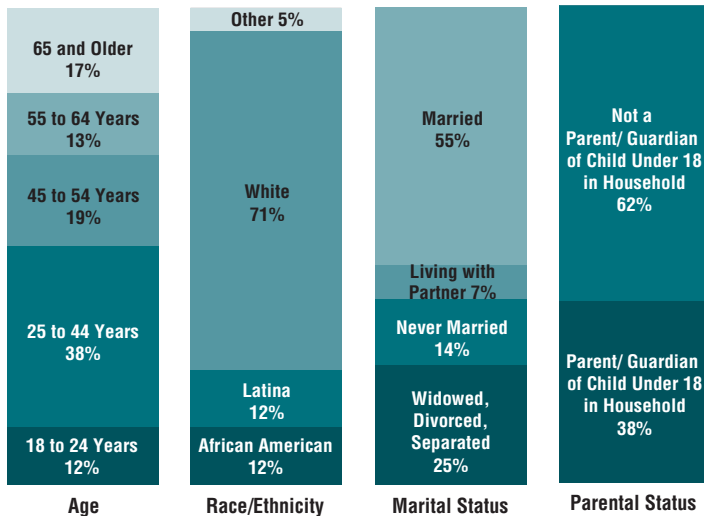
Women in the United States are an extremely diverse population. Their health needs, their insurance options, and how they use health care services are shaped by a wide range of factors including their age, income, race and ethnicity, level of education, family structure, and employment status, just to name a few.

Despite these differences, there are common health issues and concerns that all women face in their lives that cut across demographic and socio-economic characteristics. Chronic health problems, cancer, pregnancy, and disability are among the range of health concerns that can affect any woman. Often the major differences among women are the resources they have available in terms of health insurance coverage, income, and family and societal supports to address their health challenges.

This section provides information about the characteristics of adult women to serve as a backdrop for understanding women's diverse health needs and health experiences. Subsequent chapters in this report examine women's health issues by analyzing the differences experienced by women in many of these socio-demographic groups, with an emphasis on subgroups of women who are at greatest risk for poor health and impeded access to care.



Exhibit 1a
Selected Demographic Characteristics
of Women, Ages 18 and Older



* Includes Asian, Pacific Islander, American Indian, Alaska Native, people of multiple races, and those who identified themselves as "other."

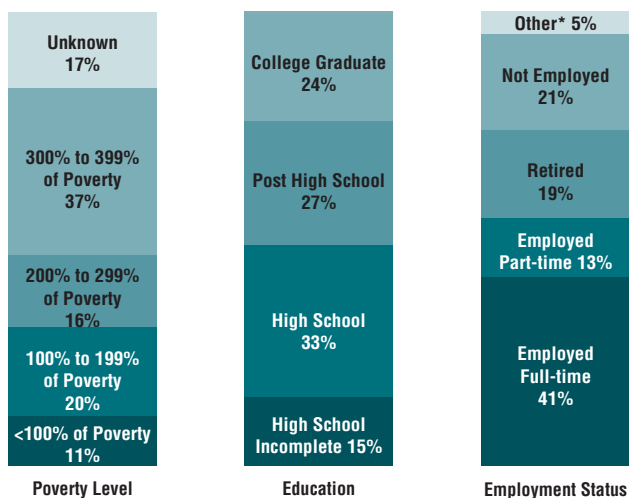
Data source: 2004 Kaiser Women's Health Survey, Kaiser Family Foundation.

Women in the U.S. are an extremely diverse population. Fifty percent of women are of reproductive age (18 to 44 years old), 32% are ages 45 to 64, and 17% are ages 65 and older. Age is an important determinant of health status and health care utilization.

While white women account for the majority of the female population, a large minority of women are women of color—Latina, African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, or another racial, mixed race, or ethnic subgroup. There is a large and growing body of research that documents the differences and disparities in health status and health care use between white people and people of color.¹

Marital status is associated with a broad range of health issues for women, including their health status, health coverage, economic level, and lifetime caregiving. Over half of women are married, one quarter are widowed, separated or divorced, 14% have never married, and 7% of women are living with a partner but not married. Nearly four in 10 women have children under 18 years living in their homes. These women also juggle meeting their family's health needs with their own health concerns and work responsibilities.

Exhibit 1b
Selected Socio-Economic Characteristics
of Women, Ages 18 and Older



Note: 100% of the federal poverty threshold was \$14,776 for a family of three in 2004. Some totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

*Includes those who are disabled, students, and unknown work status.

Data source: 2004 Kaiser Women's Health Survey, Kaiser Family Foundation.

Income, education, and employment status are all associated with health status, insurance coverage, and access to care. A sizable share of women face socioeconomic disadvantage—nearly one-third (31%) are from low-income households (less than 200% of poverty²) and half (48%) have only a high school education or lower. And while slightly over one-half of women report they work—41% employed full time and 13% part time—19% of women are retired and one quarter are not in the labor force.