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Breaking Down Barriers: Investigating Structural and Systemic Factors that Contribute to COVID-19 Disparities in African American Communities in New Jersey

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Breaking Down Barriers: Investigating Structural and Systemic Factors that Contribute to COVID-19 Disparities in African American Communities in New Jersey

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Background and Objective

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the lives of millions of Americans. Minority communities were hit the hardest as infection rates continue to skyrocket and new variants arise.

Racial and ethnic distributions of COVID-19 confirmed cases and fatalities show that African American communities are disproportionately affected compared to the remaining population.⁴ CDC reports that African Americans (AA) make up a similar share of cases relative to the overall population, at about 12%, but have a significantly higher rate of deaths compared to the population, at approximately 14%.¹

Potential Causes^{5,7,13, 14, 15}

1. social determinants of health
2. economic stability
3. neighborhood and physical environment
4. education
5. healthcare
6. chronic medical conditions

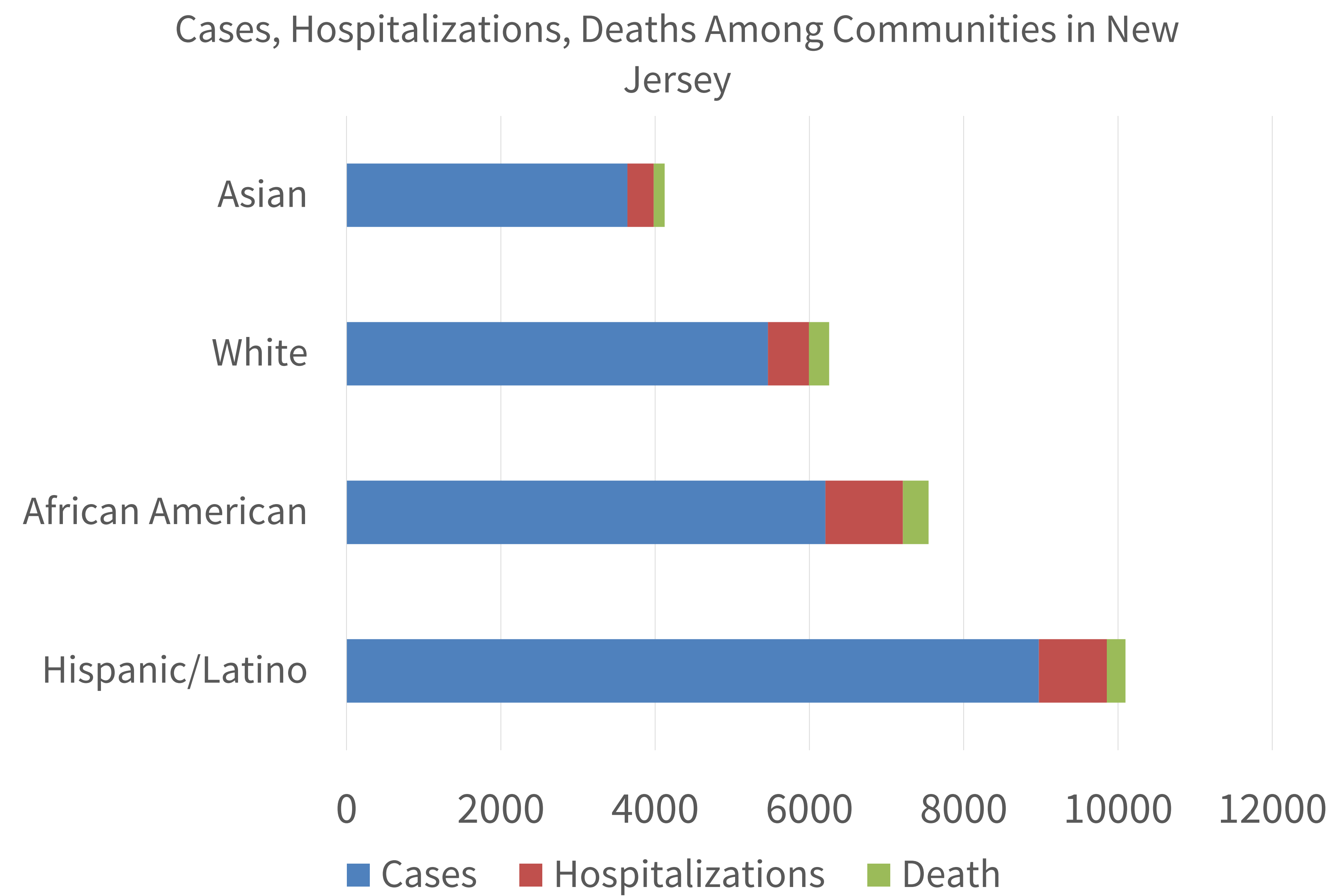
Objective: Explore contributing factors in increased COVID-19 related hospitalizations, positive tests, admission to ICUs, and death from COVID-19 in AA communities in NJ.

Vision: Promote urgency on issues that influence health and move conversations towards the plight of African American communities.

Methods

A comprehensive literature review was conducted using PubMed, JAMA, SCOPUS, NJ COVID-19 Data Dashboard, KFF, and Web of Science. Keywords used in searches included “COVID-19”, “New Jersey”, “minority communities”, “health disparities”, “African American”, “chronic disease”, “poverty”, “malnutrition”, “housing insecurity”, and “obesity”. Exclusion criteria included any studies where the population of focus was not African American or studies that did not show the race variable as a social determinant. All articles were screened to verify that inclusion and exclusion criteria were met.

Results



Total COVID-19 cases, represents data in New Jersey as of March 7th, 2021. African American people were most likely to have died or hospitalized from COVID-19. Graphic only includes demographic groups reported by the state.³¹

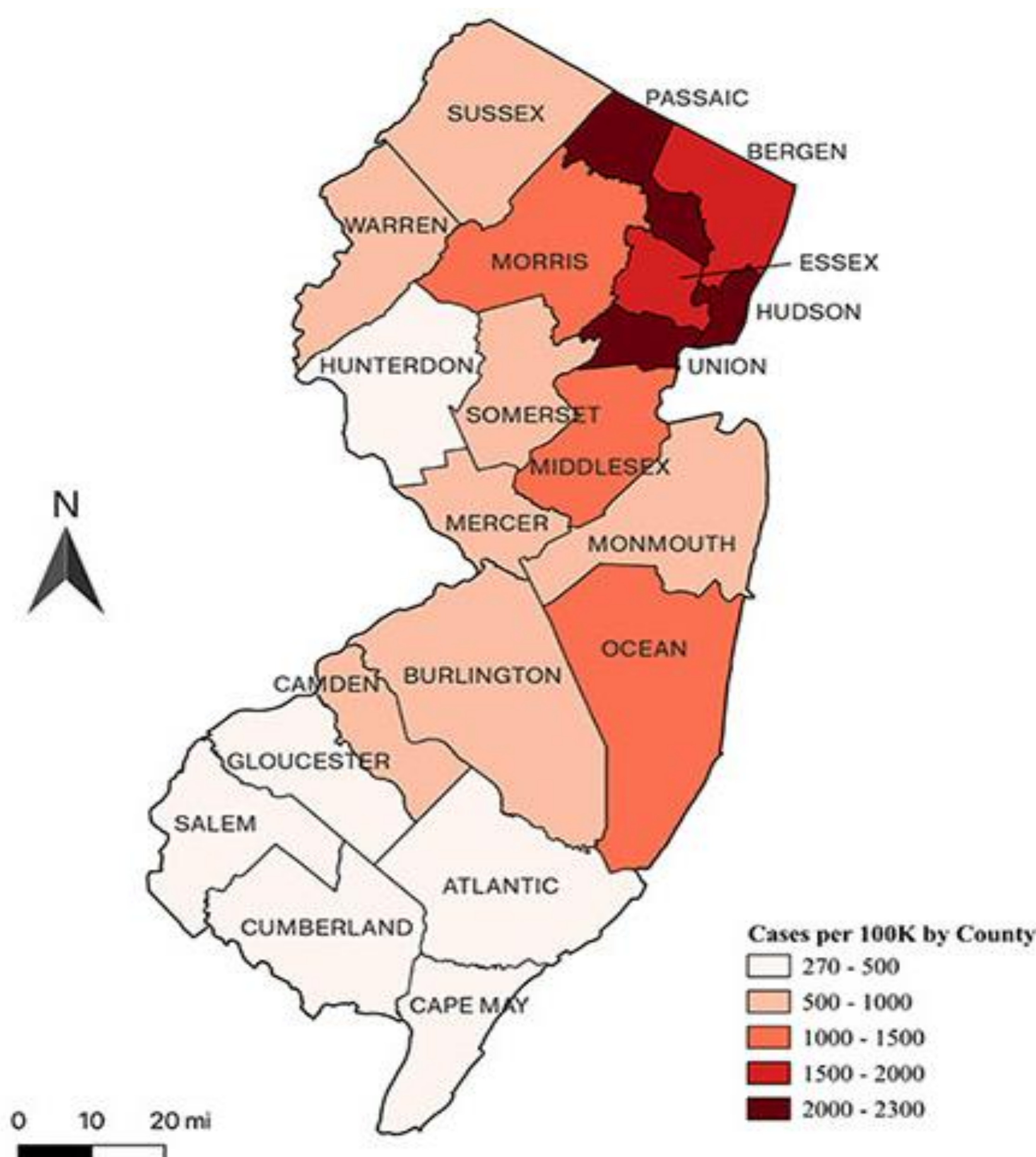


FIGURE 2. Cumulative Cases per 100K by County: April 27, 2020

<https://news.camden.rutgers.edu/2021/04/covid-impact-nj-municipalities/>

Conclusion

The literature review identified risk factors contributing to COVID-19 burden in African American communities in NJ. Health is determined by socioeconomic, environmental, access to and quality of medical care, and behavioral factors that lead to detrimental health outcomes.⁸ Mitigating deleterious determinants in AA communities require addressing these risk factors while using a biopsychosocial approach.³⁴

The historical context within which AA communities are disproportionately affected as well as the social and economic dimensions of the current pandemic were examined. With this information, health care providers, community organizers, and elected officials can work collaboratively to mitigate health care inequities and improve health outcomes for underserved communities. They will be able to provide communities with data, evidence, and guidance to act and public health initiatives to start driving policy changes in local communities that consider the challenges faced by minority populations.

Future Directions

Studies are needed to investigate the short-term and long-term effects of COVID-19 in minority communities, but also how health services are utilized by these patients and their health outcomes and how it was all influenced by discrimination. The impact of historical discriminatory policies on AA communities, impact of COVID-19 on minority communities to other pandemics in the past, and collection of more data on racial disparities in COVID-19 incidence and mortality are vital for developing universal strategies and solutions for minority communities.

References

