

### The US-Caribbean Health Disparities Research Collaboration

The US National Institute on Minority health and Health Disparities has funded a 5-year program to explore and compare for the first time health disparities among African-descent populations in the Caribbean and the US. This partnership between the Sullivan Alliance (1) and The University of the West Indies (2) is using published work, Caribbean health databases, and open-access data to build an evidence-based picture of Caribbean health disparities.

### Data Sources

This briefing reports life expectancy at birth (LE). Country-level population totals and LE were extracted from the United Nations World Population Prospects 2012 Revision (3).

### Key Findings: Life Expectancy in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)

- Regional life expectancy at birth (LE) has increased consistently in the past 40 years
- In 2010, only 5 countries in the Americas did not achieve a LE of 70 years: 4 of these countries were in the Caribbean
- Compared to the world region with the highest LE (Northern Europe in 1965 with LE of 71.5 years, Australia/New Zealand in 2010 with LE of 81.9 years), the LE at birth shortfall fell from 14.6 years in 1965 to 5.6 years in 2010 in Central America, from 14.1 to 6.8 years in South America, and from 11.8 years to 9.1 years in the Caribbean
- Notwithstanding these important gains, the Caribbean, which had the highest LE at birth and the lowest LE at birth disparities in LAC in 1965, had the lowest LE and the highest disparities by 2010
- There has been considerable variation in the 40-year LE improvement between Caribbean member States (See Figure).

### Key Findings: Life Expectancy in African-descent Populations

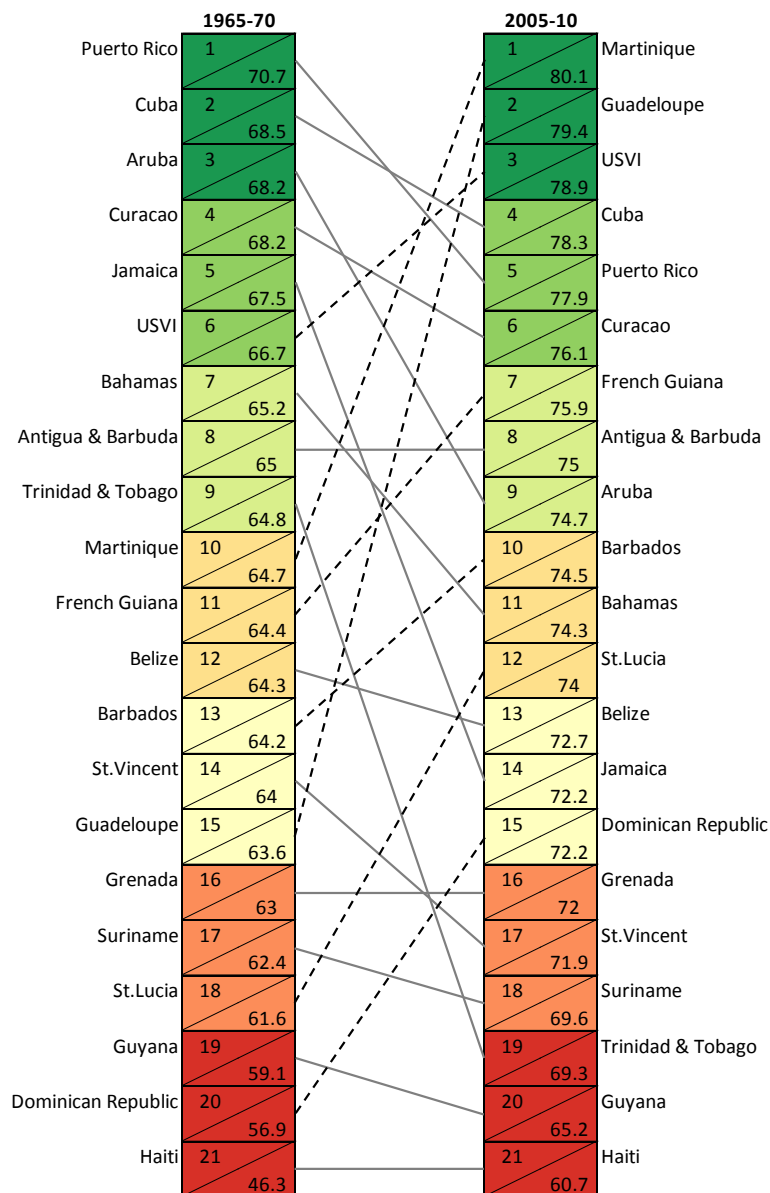
- Since 1990, the life expectancy improvement among African-Americans has exceeded that of Afro-Caribbeans, so that the life expectancy gap, which was 1.5 years in favour of the Caribbean population in 1990, had been reversed by 2009, with African-Americans having an extra 0.6 years of expected life
- This relative improvement among African-Americans was primarily due to the improving mortality experience of African-American males, who reduced a 3.4 year life expectancy deficit in 1990 to a 0.1 year deficit in 2009.

### Policy Implications

- There are marked disparities in LE trends between Caribbean countries, and Caribbean LE improvements have fallen short of gains seen by regional neighbours
- There is an urgent need to understand reasons for these disparities
- How much inequality can be explained by differences in trends in risk factors (such as smoking, blood pressure, cholesterol, obesity)?
- And how much can be explained by differences in the coverage of effective health care (such as effective treatment of blood pressure, glucose, hypercholesterolaemia, acute myocardial infarction, heart failure, and so on)?

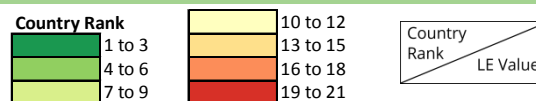
**For more information** See Hambleton: (A) Trends in longevity in the Americas: disparities in life expectancy in women and men, 1965-2010, PLOS One (DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0129778). (B) Cause-of-Death Disparities in the African Diaspora: Exploring Differences Among Shared-Heritage Populations, AJPH (doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2015.302676)

**FIGURE.** Life expectancy at birth in 1965-70 and 2005-10 among 21 Caribbean territories



The figure reports life expectancy at birth (LE) among 21 Caribbean countries in 1965-70 and in 2005-10, ordered by LE and coloured by relative rank (See Legend). Connecting lines map the change in relative position in the 40 years since 1965-70.

### Legend



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