Healthcare Inequality and the COVID-19 Pandemic in Brazil

Since COVID-19 was first reported in Brazil on February 26, there have been more than 580,000 confirmed cases and more than 32,000 deaths—and the numbers keep rising.

Unequal distribution of medical resources between public and private hospitals, combined with regional and socio-economic disparities, threatens to exacerbate this public health crisis in Brazil.

The majority of COVID-19 cases in Brazil are concentrated in the Southeast region.

However, regions more reliant on the public system, such as the North and Northeast, have been harder hit.

Four states, two in the North and two in the Northeast regions have already reached over 90% capacity of ICU beds in the public system.

In the Southeast, public health systems in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro are also on the brink of collapse.

51% of all ICU bed are available in private hospitals
25% of the population uses private healthcare
12% of the Northeast has access to private healthcare

The World Health Organization recommends that there be at least 1 ICU bed per 10,000 people

Public hospitals in Brazil fail to meet this benchmark in 17 out of 27 states
Private hospitals boast a national average of 4.08 beds per 10,000 individuals

"The pandemic initially harshly hit a population...of white, wealthy people with broad access to health, [so] it is frightening to think about [COVID-19's] effects on the black population."

Lúcia Xavier
Director of Críola, an NGO focused on black women's health.

67% of public health system users identify as Black
15-25% of those covered by private health insurance plans are Black or pardos

Created by Malia Wilson, Woodrow Wilson Center, Brazil Institute
Sources: Folha de São Paulo, Conselho Federal de Medicina, Foreign Policy, Valor Econômico, Ministério da Saúde do Brasil, Oiêle, saúde coletiva, Brazil de Fato.
All numbers are current as of 6/4/2020.