

# Poor, Older Black Americans Are an Afterthought in the COVID-19 Crisis

**We must stretch and strengthen our capacity for our elders !**

According to the Next Avenue newsletter of April 3, 2020, Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick recently said that he and other older Americans would be willing to risk death due to the [coronavirus](#) in order to protect the U.S. economy. What followed was a backlash by people warning that even the *thought* of sacrificing the elderly is unacceptable. Of even greater concern, though, is what this agenda would mean for poor, older black Americans who already are an afterthought in this country and stand to be impacted the most by the pandemic. Individuals with intersectional marginalized identities such as poor, black and older Americans are typically portrayed as draining America's infrastructure. This compounded narrative is not only racist, it pushes a common ageist rhetoric.

As a whole, the aging population faces daily injustices such as unfair hiring practices in the workplace and negative stereotypes in the media. For [lower-income, older black Americans](#), these injustices are exacerbated to include lessened access to quality health care or local community resources. In times of crisis, the vulnerable are the most impacted, yet the least heard.

Black people in the United States are already at a [higher risk for many illnesses and diseases than white Americans](#), according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Age and income only raise those numbers. And the incidence of chronic health conditions such as diabetes and heart disease is seen at a much higher rate among older, black Americans in lower-income areas than others.

What is the COVID-19 economic debate really saying about the bulk of Americans who'll be detrimentally impacted as the virus continues to spread?

For one thing, it continues to push the rhetoric that older adults are disposable and defines them by their deficits and disparities.

## **Appreciating Our Black Elders**

They are more than sick cases and incidence numbers. Our elders hold the wisdom of having lived through several other global health pandemics, wars, the civil rights movement and the Jim Crow era, as well as terrorism attacks such as 9/11. Many survived these while raising children and holding down backbreaking jobs. These are **OUR caregivers, mentors, matriarchs, patriarchs and community leaders.**

Many older adults at the margin face poverty, have less access to health care than others and are without the privilege to hold work-from-home jobs. Local and national officials need to protect this population and disavow any intention of “sacrificing” our elders. While many communities have taken it into their own hands to devise mutual aid efforts to support our most vulnerable, we need mandated guidance from our political leaders to prioritize the health of those who have contributed so much to this country . . . and to **US.**

**We must stretch and strengthen our capacity for our elders !**