

# Appalachia's worsening disparities in cancer mortality should be viewed as a regional manifestation of widening global disparities in health outcomes rather than a uniquely American phenomena

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We would like to bring to the readership's attention the continued worsening of cancer mortality in the U.S. Appalachian Mountains. Cancer is the leading cause of death in the region. Disparities in outcomes between the Appalachia and Non-Appalachian people of Kentucky have worsened over the last thirty years.<sup>1,2</sup>

Appalachian regional health disparities, worsened by persistent stereotypes, are often framed as a unique challenge tied to cultural practices, geography, poverty, coal extraction, and widespread use of tobacco products. In our experiences providing patient care to the Appalachian people of Eastern Kentucky, we have witnessed firsthand the biases that lead to healthcare providers placing the blame for poor outcomes on the Appalachian people themselves, cultural values, and lifestyles.

Rather than a uniquely American problem, Appalachia's health disparities can be viewed as one regional manifestation of widening global disparities in health outcomes and healthcare investment between growing, economically successful urban regions and rural, impoverished areas, particularly in regions with sizable resource extraction industries.<sup>3</sup> Resource extraction regions are impacted by global economic forces originating outside their locales and create a boom–bust cycle leading to economic degradation, poverty, and social fragmentation, such as has occurred in deindustrialized coal rich regions of Appalachia.<sup>4,5</sup> Appalachia in this regard bears more similarity to these global regions than wealthier urban portions of the United States. Solutions aimed at addressing these disparities should take this into account.

## Contributors

Literature search—KS and RCM.

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## Declaration of interests

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