

Aflac's commitment to people with sickle cell disease



Cancer, arthritis, asthma, diabetes — these are just a few of the well-known conditions that are prevalent in America. Celebrities share their struggles with them, sports leagues launch campaigns to raise awareness about them, and the average citizen is likely to know at least a few people who have them. But there's another disease that doesn't always garner the same attention: sickle cell disease.

Sickle cell disease isn't uncommon — especially among minorities

Sickle cell disease (SCD) is a group of inherited red blood cell disorders. While healthy blood cells are round, moving through small blood vessels to carry oxygen throughout the body, the red blood cells in those with SCD become hard and sticky, and look like the C-shaped farm tool known as the sickle. These cells die early, causing a constant shortage of red blood cells. Additionally, when traveling through small blood vessels, they can get stuck, clogging the blood flow and causing extreme pain and other serious problems, including infections and strokes.¹

If both parents have the sickle cell gene, or trait, there is a 25% chance their child may have sickle cell disease, and a 50% chance the child may inherit the gene and not have the disease but pass it on to their children.² As a result, all newborns in the United States are tested for the painful disease,³ and parents can even have their child tested in utero. In fact, there's an option for would-be parents to test the genetic likelihood of their children having the disease before conception.⁴

This damaging condition affects roughly 100,000 Americans at any time, and deals a heavier blow to minorities, occurring in 1 out of every 365 Black or African American births and 1 out of every 16,300 Hispanic American births.⁵ Additionally, one in every 13 Black or African-American babies is born with sickle cell trait,⁵ meaning that they don't necessarily have symptoms of SCD but can pass it on to their children. Yet while those with the trait usually carry only one of the two genes that cause the production of abnormal hemoglobin, extreme conditions such as severe dehydration and intense physical activity can occasionally lead to serious health issues — including sudden death.³

People with sickle cell disease often have minimal access to comprehensive care

Even though there are more people living with sickle cell disease in the United States than with any other genetic condition — such as cystic fibrosis or hemophilia — they have considerably less access to comprehensive coordinated care. While these other conditions have extensive networks of multidisciplinary specialty centers devoted to them, there is no comparable national network of treatment centers for sickle cell disease.⁶ (The [Sickle Cell Disease Association of America](#), which advocates for people affected by sickle cell conditions and empowers community-based organizations to maximize quality of life and raise public consciousness while advancing the search for a universal cure, does have 51 chapters across the United States.)



As a direct result, approximately 20% of people with SCD usually receive their care in the emergency room, which can lead to less than ideal management of their chronic condition. This may play a factor into why the life expectancy gap between Black people with the disease and without it is an eye-opening 35 years.⁶

Aflac is here to care — and to help.

Aflac's commitment to combating sickle cell disease and its effects

For years, Aflac has been committed to helping combat not only cancer, but various blood disorders — including sickle cell disease. Since 1995, Aflac has worked with Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, helping make the Aflac Cancer and Blood Disorders Center one of the leading pediatric programs in the country. And when it comes to sickle cell disease, their focus has earned them the mantle of leader. The company has contributed more than \$165 million to the center, including direct contributions to its sickle cell program.

The Aflac Cancer and Blood Disorders Center is the largest pediatric sickle cell disease program in the country, caring for nearly 2,000 kids each year. Aflac's support helps fund doctors, social workers, teachers and more. The Center's accolades also include recognition for the most important goal — getting kids healthy enough to return home — ranking #1 in the nation for total sickle cell disease discharges in 2021.⁷

Aflac's commitment doesn't stop there.

Through numerous group and individual product benefits, Aflac has opened the door for those with relevant coverage to get help in their individual and familial fights with SCD. Between benefits from critical illness insurance, hospital indemnity insurance, short-term disability insurance and more, Aflac insurance products can help families from the screening and diagnosis stages through treatment, hospitalization and the inability to work.

In 2022, Aflac expanded its award-winning My Special Aflac Duck® program for kids with cancer to include kids with sickle cell disease as well, providing the same comforting robotic duck, free of charge, to help ease the distress children with the condition experience. Tailored resources will include new physical tools such as a blanket and IV, and a digital experience via the duck's SCD App Mode.⁷

Aflac's commitment to the sickle cell community isn't just service — it's proven. And it will continue to be proven time and again in the next 25 years and more, just as it has been in the last 25.

¹ CDC. "What is Sickle Cell Disease?" [Accessed 7.10.2023](#).

² CDC. "What is Sickle Cell Trait?" Last reviewed July 6, 2023. [Accessed 7.10.23](#).

³ American Society of Hematology. "Sickle Cell Disease." [Accessed 7.10.2023](#).

⁴ NIH National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. "Sickle cell disease." Updated July 15, 2022. [Accessed 7.10.2023](#).

⁵ CDC. "Data & Statistics on Sickle Cell Disease." Reviewed 12.16.2020. [Accessed 7.10.2023](#).

⁶ SCD Silent Damage. "Sickle Cell Resources." [Accessed 7.10.2023](#).

⁷ Aflac. 2022 Business and Sustainability Report. March 2023. [Accessed 7.10.23](#).

The content within is for informational purposes for agent and broker-facing audiences. This information is not approved to distribute to prospective insureds, to prospective accounts, or to use as a solicitation. Misrepresenting this, or any, information to solicit or induce an insured to lapse, forfeit, or surrender an insurance policy is prohibited by law. Any use not specifically permitted herein is strictly prohibited. **Aflac includes Aflac and/or Aflac New York and/or Continental American Insurance Company and/or Continental American Life Insurance Company.**

Aflac | WWHQ | 1932 Wynnton Road | Columbus, GA 31999 | Continental American Insurance Company | Columbia, SC