

ABIPA – ASHEVILLE BUNCOMBE INSTITUTE OF PARITY ACHIEVEMENT

Colorectal Cancer Rising Among Young Adults

By JéWana Grier-McEachin, Executive Director

If you're under 50 it is time to start being proactive.

Colorectal cancer used to be considered a disease affecting mostly older adults; however, it is rising at an alarming rate among younger people. Today, about 1 in 5 diagnoses occurs in someone under 55, and the disease has become a leading cause of cancer-related deaths among young adults.

Health experts say awareness, lifestyle choices, and early screening can make a life-saving difference.



JéWana Grier-McEachin. Photo: Red Angle Photography

What You Need to Know

Colon and rectal cancers—together known as colorectal cancer (CRC)—are the third most commonly diagnosed cancers in the United States and the third leading cause of cancer deaths among both men and women.

According to the American Cancer Society, an estimated 108,860 new cases of colorectal cancer will be diagnosed in the US in 2026, with about 55,230 deaths expected.

The lifetime risk is significant: about 1 in 25 men, and 1 in 26 women, will develop the disease.

What concerns doctors most is the growing number of cases in younger adults. Rates among people under 50 have been rising by nearly 3% each year, even while rates in the overall population have declined slightly.

Researchers believe more than half of colorectal cancer cases may be linked to lifestyle factors, including diet, inactivity, smoking, and alcohol use.

Lifestyle Risks

Diet: Diets high in processed foods and red meat but low in fiber, fruits, and vegetables have been linked to higher colorectal cancer risk. Experts recommend limiting red meat and increasing plant-based foods.

Physical inactivity and obesity: Sedentary lifestyles and excess body weight can raise cancer risk. Health professionals say 30–60 minutes of daily physical activity, even walking, can support colon health.

Smoking and alcohol use: Long-term tobacco use and heavy drinking are also associated with colorectal cancer. Reducing or eliminating these habits can significantly lower risk.

Other Risk Factors

Some risks cannot be changed.

Age: Risk increases as people get older, particularly after age 50. However, rising cases in younger adults mean awareness should begin earlier.

Family history and genetics: People with relatives who have had colorectal cancer or colon polyps face higher risk. Certain inherited conditions—such as Lynch syndrome and familial adenomatous polyposis (FAP)—greatly increase the likelihood of developing the disease.

Race and health disparities: American Indian and Alaska Native populations experience the highest colorectal cancer rates in the US, followed by African Americans. Limited access to screening and healthcare contributes to these disparities.

Warning Signs
Symptoms can be subtle but should not be ignored. Watch for:

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Symptoms can be subtle but should not be ignored. Watch for:

- Persistent changes in bowel habits
- Blood in the stool
- Abdominal pain or cramping
- Unexplained weight loss
- Fatigue or low iron levels

Anyone experiencing these symptoms should consult a healthcare provider.

Screening Saves Lives

Colorectal cancer is often preventable and highly treatable when detected early. Medical guidelines recommend regular screening starting at age 45, or earlier for people with higher risk.

Screening options include colonoscopies, stool-based tests that detect hidden blood or abnormal DNA, and newer blood-based tests designed to detect cancer DNA in the bloodstream.

A Community Conversation

March is Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month, and we are urging people to talk openly about gut health and screening. Sharing information with family and friends—and staying informed about personal risk—can help catch the disease earlier and save lives.



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Help Us Celebrate Our Birthday by Gifting ABIPA a Donation of \$21

Tax-deductible donations can be made by sending a check to ABIPA, PO Box 448, Asheville, NC 28802, or donate online at www.abipa.org. Thank you for your support!



JyAire McEachin

Community Oral Health Perspectives

by JyAire McEachin, OhPro Research Assistant

Well hello, my name is JyAire McEachin and I am one of two research assistants on the ABIPA-r's OhPro team.



We are officially launching the data collection portion of our OH Pro project.

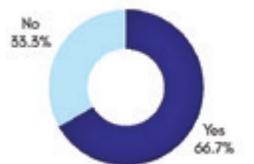
In December 2025, we asked community members attending the ABIPA Sunday

Shop event to share their perspectives about oral health and dental care. We hope that the responses shared by 21 people will inform programming and policy making.

Share your perspectives and learn more about OH Pro by scanning the QR code.



In the past year, did you want or need Dental Care but couldn't get it?



What is the BEST thing about going to the Dentist?

What is the WORST thing about going to the Dentist?

What is the farthest you had to travel to visit the Dentist?



I am very excited to have the opportunity to be a part of this team. My hope is to learn more, engage more, take initiative, and in the end make a change with what we're doing. No matter how small or big the changes may be, as long as we help make a way through the Blue Cross Blue Shield foundation's efforts one step at a time, there will be a significant difference made.

My role on the team is as one of the assistant researchers. But, in addition to that, I am also working on our media production, promotion, as well as some event coordination. I am super happy to be able to be involved in this way. Being able to contribute to this amazing movement with artistic freedom is also a huge plus for me.

There is a lot in store with this project, and we are glad you are joining us on the journey!

ABIPA

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ABIPA promotes economic, social, and healthy parity achievement for African Americans and other underserved populations in Buncombe County through advocacy, education, research, and community partnerships.

