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# Expanding Donor Diversity is Critical to Patient Care

As the diversity of the United States' population continues to grow, transfusions remain a critical course of therapy for certain patient populations. The blood community is working to develop solutions to recruit additional minority donors and make additional resources available to increase the prevalence of testing for compatible blood for patients. Many blood centers have already implemented minority blood donor recruitment programs, yet no single solution has led to sustained increases in minority blood donations.

## A diverse blood donor pool is critical to patient care, especially for frequently transfused patients:

A diverse blood donor pool is critical to patient care, especially for frequently transfused patients such as those with sickle cell disease (which impacts roughly 1 in 365 African Americans), thalassemia, and other blood-inherited diseases. These patients often require frequent blood transfusions, and finding a compatible unit of blood is more complex than just identifying a simple blood type. For these patients, a blood transfusion must be closely matched to their ethnic/genetic background to avoid potentially severe transfusion complications.

## Less than 20 percent of all blood donations come from communities of color:

In America today, just 19.5 percent of all blood donations come from communities of color. Increasing that amount is one of the best ways to support those living with diseases like sickle cell, since one in every 3 African Americans is a potential match for sickle cell patients. In fact, in many cases, African American donors are the only source of compatible blood for individuals living with this disease.

## Finding antigen-matched donors can unfortunately require a high cost:

Although having a similar racial and ethnic background makes matching more likely, many donors need to be tested to find a donor who has the special antigen-matched unit needed by these patients. Only a small portion of all blood donors are currently screened for antigen matching. The lack of expansive testing for these antigens, coupled with the already rare prevalence of these specific antigen matches in the current donor population, at times leads to limited availability of compatible blood for patients and the need to delay or alter the patients' care regimen.

## Increasing donation rates among younger generations can help diversify the donor base:

Nearly half of post-Millennials identify as racial or ethnic minorities. Unfortunately, today nearly 60 percent of blood donations still come from individuals over 40, and nearly 45 percent come from individuals older than 50. Even more concerning, between 2017-2019, there was a 10.1 percent decrease in donations from 16-18-year-olds, and a 15.1% decrease in donations from 19-24-year-olds. This lack of donation at younger ages is a concerning indicator for whether these individuals will donate later in life at a rate sufficient to replace donors in aging generations.

**To grow and diversify the donor base, America's Blood Centers is asking Congress to develop and implement a new pilot program that would provide grant funding to support blood centers' efforts to reach young and diverse blood donors, ensuring current and future patient needs are met.**


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