

# THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN COUNSELING

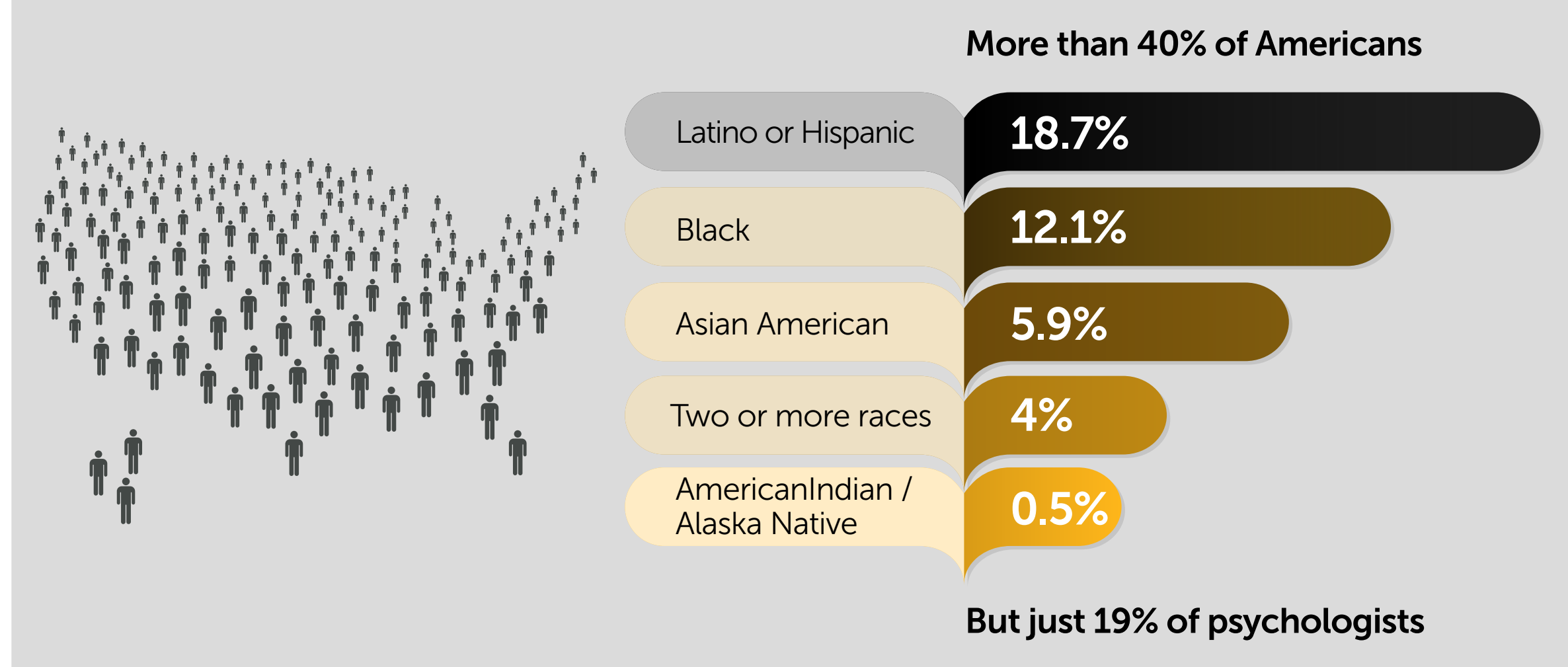


The demographic landscape of the United States has been changing, with the Brookings Institution reporting that the nation's diversity is accelerating rapidly. However, although the American Psychological Association (APA) says a more diverse group of psychologists could better serve the country's population, the mental health field hasn't kept pace. A lack of representation contributes to barriers to mental healthcare access for marginalized communities. Enhancing cultural competence is paramount.

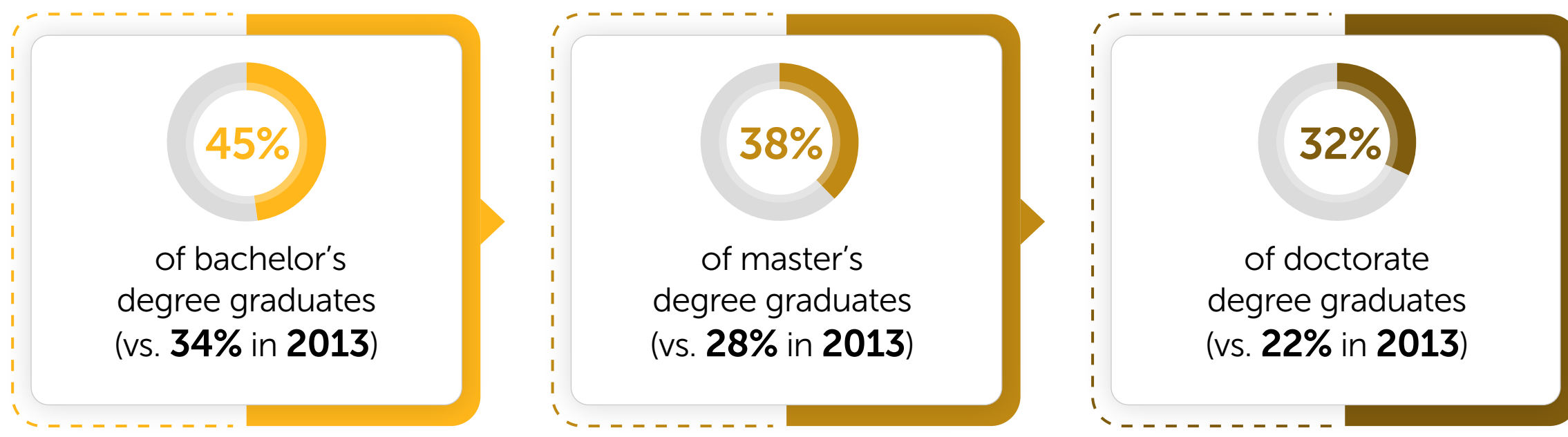
## A LACK OF REPRESENTATION

Many individuals seeking mental health support struggle to find therapists who share their cultural background or understand their unique experiences.

People of color represent:



APA reports that while more people from underrepresented groups are graduating with psychology degrees, progress is still needed. People from those groups make up 42% of the U.S. population, but their representation among psychology graduates is much lower. The organization's 2022 report found that psychology students from underrepresented groups made up:



The report noted the importance of eliminating educational barriers as a key part of improving racial and ethnic diversity among psychologists.

## BARRIERS TO ACCESS

Those who need mental health assistance may encounter many barriers to access.

### THERAPIST SHORTAGE

The federal government has designated areas without enough mental health practitioners as Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs). In 2024, there were 6,417 such areas, with 122 million people living in them.



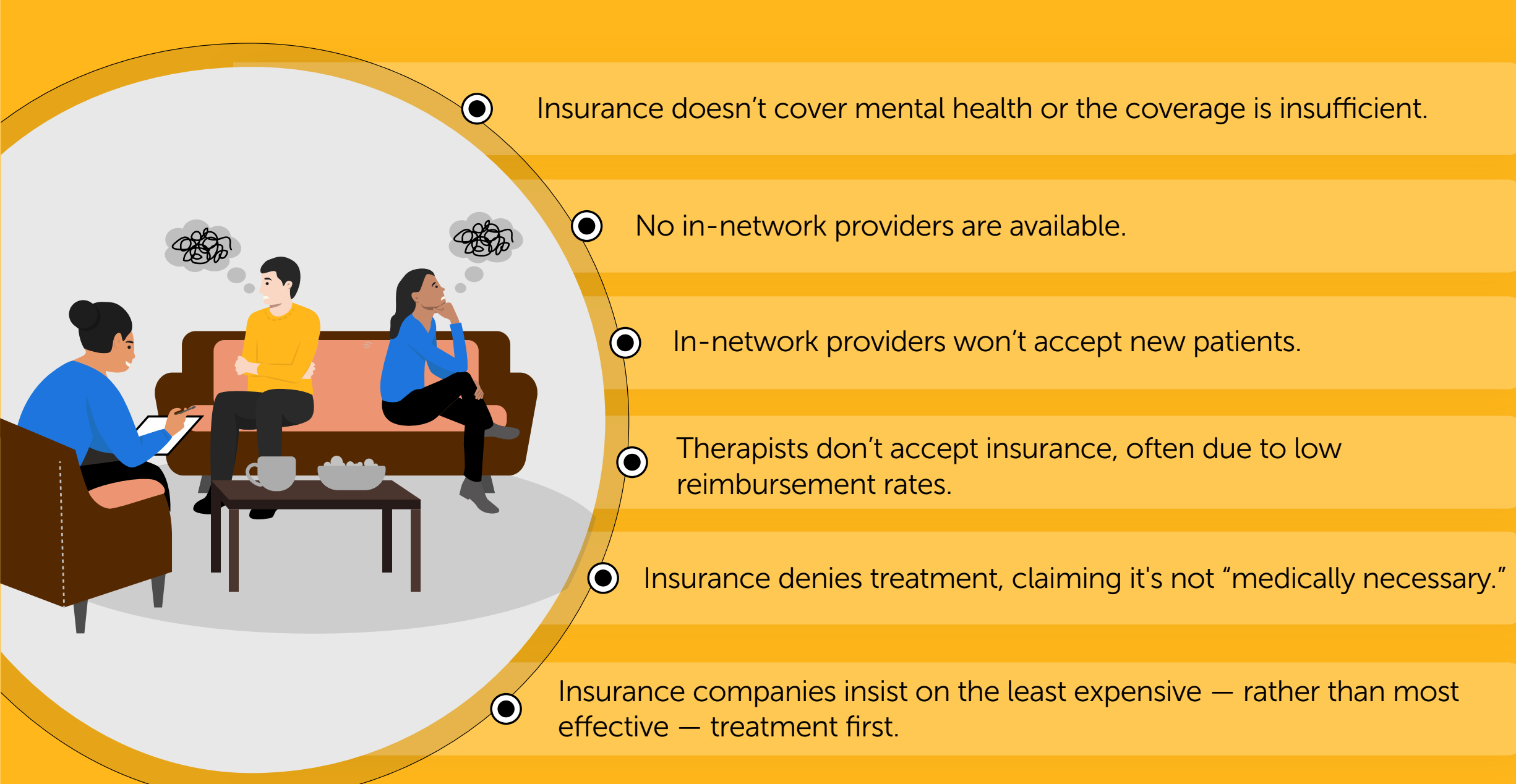
The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which maintains the data, says more than 6,000 additional practitioners are needed to meet demand. Currently, only 27% of the nationwide need for mental healthcare is being met.

### INSURANCE

The therapist shortage is certainly part of the access problem. However, even when a diverse set of therapists is available, several barriers to access still exist, including the following:



While insurance companies have begun to cover mental healthcare, the following issues can still prevent people from accessing treatment:

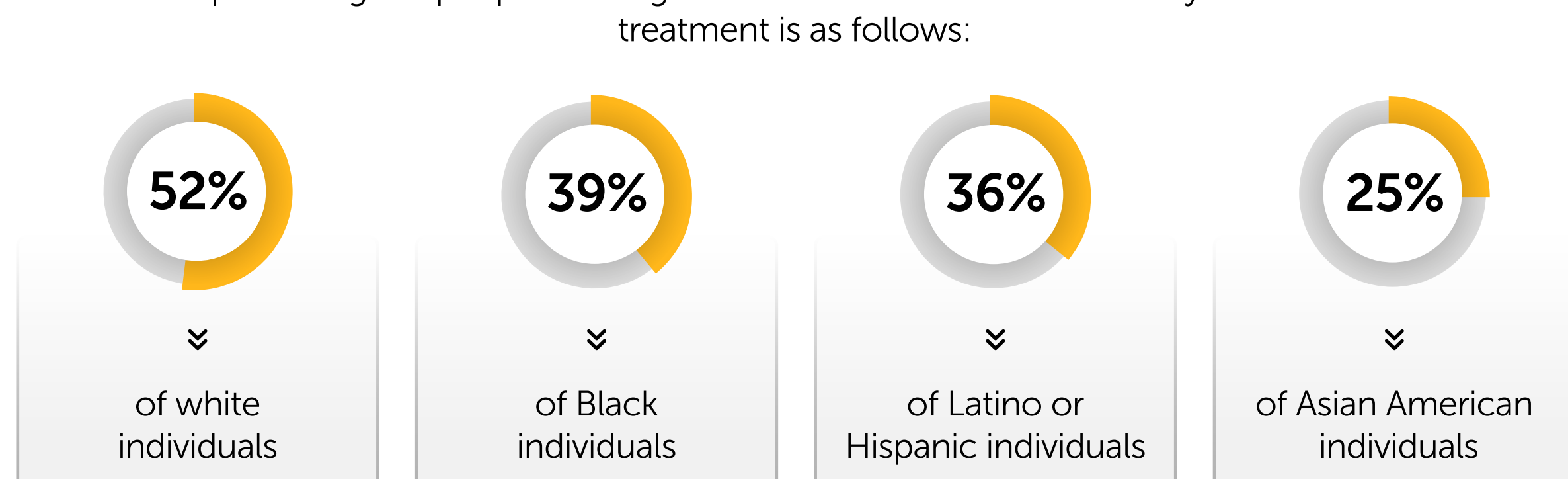


## IMPORTANCE OF CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Culturally competent therapists create spaces where clients feel understood, respected, and empowered. Treating clients with cultural sensitivity can have a significant impact on treatment outcomes.

### LACK OF TREATMENT

Without access to culturally competent treatment options, many people of color go without. The percentage of people in marginalized communities who actually receive needed treatment is as follows:



### CULTURALLY COMPETENT CARE

When people of color do find culturally competent treatment, their results improve. For example, the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) has reported that patients with access to healthcare practitioners of the same race may experience the following:



Psychologists who understand a patient's background and culture can tailor their approach to address the specific challenges and strengths that stem from that background.

## CONCLUSION

Marginalized communities face many barriers to receiving the mental healthcare they need. In addition to geographical and systemic obstacles, a counselor shortage compounds the problems. It takes more than 10 years for psychiatrists to gain the education and skills necessary to practice. However, psychologists and other mental health practitioners can be qualified to practice in less time, making them a crucial part of addressing the issue.