

AHRQ Analyses of MEPS Data Inform Estimates of the Number of Long-Term Uninsured

Estimates of the health insurance status of the U.S. civilian noninstitutionalized population are critical to policymakers and others concerned with access to medical care and the cost and quality of that care. Health insurance helps people get timely access to medical care and protects them against the risk of expensive and unanticipated medical events. When estimating the size of the uninsured population, it is important to consider the distinction between those uninsured for short periods of time and those who are uninsured for several years.

Using data from the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS), this Statistical Brief provides detailed estimates of the proportion of the U.S. civilian noninstitutionalized non-elderly (under age 65) population that was uninsured for the entire 2004–2007 period and identifies groups most likely to lack coverage over that four-year period.

According to the MEPS, 31.9 percent (83.4 million people) of the under-65 population was uninsured for at least one month during the full two-year period (calendar years 2006 and 2007), and 10.9 percent (28.5 million people) was uninsured for the entire two-year period. Two-thirds of those individuals lacking coverage for all of 2006–2007 were also without coverage for the entire prior 2004–2005 two-year period. This translates to 7.1 percent (18.5 million people) of the total population under age 65 being uninsured for the entire four-year period from 2004 through 2007.

Staff from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality's Center for Financing, Access, and Cost Trends (CFACT) conducted the data analyses on the long-term uninsured from the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS), which informed their responses to a request from the Office of Health Reform.

The Statistical Brief is available at

http://www.meps.ahrq.gov/mepsweb/data_stats/Pub_ProdResults_Details.jsp?pt=Statistical%20Brief&opt=2&id=920

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| Request for information from: | Office of Health Reform U.S. Department of Health and Human Services |
| Response from: | Stephen B. Cohen, Ph.D., Director, CFACT Joel W. Cohen, Ph.D., Director, Division of Social and Economic Research, CFACT |
| Information requested: | August 24, 2009 |
| Information supplied: | August 24, 2009 |