

# Raising Women's Voices for the health care we need

**August 26, 2008**

**Breaking News and Analysis from Raising Women's Voices  
U.S. Census Bureau Releases 2007 Data on the Uninsured**

This morning, the U.S. Census Bureau released its annual report on household income, poverty and health insurance coverage for the nation, with data for 2007. The release of this report presents an important opportunity for women's health advocates to make our case about the need for quality, affordable health care for all.

## **Overview**

While there were fewer uninsured Americans in 2007 (45.7 million) than in 2006 (47 million), Census bureau spokesman David Johnson acknowledged that the decline could be largely attributed to increases in the number of children receiving coverage under government health insurance programs. The State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) is one such program. It gives funds to states in order to provide health insurance to families with children who, otherwise, could not afford health care for their children. In 2007, President Bush vetoed a bill that would have allowed the SCHIP program to expand; stating that he believed it would "federalize health care." The data released today show just how important programs like SCHIP are to American families.

Further, the new Census data show that government programs are covering more Americans. The percentage of people covered by government health insurance programs, including Medicaid, increased in 2007. The percentage of people covered by government health insurance programs increased to 27.8 percent in 2007, from 27.0 percent in 2006. The percentage and number of people covered by Medicaid increased to 13.2 percent and 39.6 million in 2007, up from 12.9 percent and 38.3 million in 2006.

Simultaneously, fewer people were insured by private health insurance. The percentage of people covered by private health insurance was 67.5 percent, down from 67.9 percent in 2006. The percentage of people covered by employment-based health insurance decreased to 59.3 in 2007 from 59.7 percent in 2006.

These data suggest that more people turned to public insurance programs to get health care coverage as the economy grew weaker. Further, as noted by Karen Davis of the Commonwealth Fund, the announced drop of 1.3 million in the number of uninsured people from 2006 to 2007 was exactly equal to the growth in coverage under Medicaid.

## **Women and Health Insurance**

Access to public insurance was critical for women, who increasingly depend on it for access to health care. A total of 29.8 percent of women had government health insurance (Medicaid, Medicare and military insurance combined), compared to 25.7 percent of men.

Here's the breakdown by source of insurance for women (as compared to men):

- 67.5 percent of women received coverage from private health insurance, (identical to men);
- 9.4 percent directly purchased health insurance (compared to 8.5% of men)
- 29.8 percent government insurance (compared to 25.7 percent of men). Within government insurance coverage:
  - 14.2 percent of women received Medicaid coverage, compared to 12.2 percent of men
  - 5.4 percent received Medicare, compared to 12.2 percent of men;
  - 3.3 percent received military, compared to 4.0 percent of men.

Overall, the un-insurance rate for women in 2007 was 13.9 percent, as compared to 14.2 percent in 2006 and 13.8 percent in 2005. This decline in 2007 is only a single-year phenomenon. The 13.9 percent figure is higher than any other year since 1999, when it was 12.9 percent. While it is good news that more women were covered in 2007 than in 2006, we must work to ensure that this trend continues and is not merely a single-year anomaly.

The uninsurance rate for men in 2007 was 16.7 percent, as compared to 17.5 percent in 2006 and 16.8 percent in 2005. Despite the decline in 2007, the rate in 2007 was still higher than the rates for all years from 1999-2004.

### **Health Disparities Continue**

The new Census data also show continuing disparities in coverage that affected low-income people and people of color in 2007. While the percentages of Black and Hispanic people without health insurance declined from 2006 to 2007, their rates of uninsurance were still dramatically higher than for whites. The uninsurance rate for Blacks fell from 20.5 percent in 2006 to 19.5 percent in 2007, and the rate for Hispanics fell from 34.1 percent in 2006 to 32.1 percent in 2007. However, both groups had rates significantly higher than the uninsured rate for whites, which was 10.4 percent in 2007, down from 10.8 percent in 2006.

Women of color still face the highest rates of un-insurance among women. The percentage of uninsured white women has remained constant, at 9.7 percent, for the past three years. Of black women, 17.9 percent were uninsured in 2007, compared to 18.6 in 2006 and 17.3 percent in 2005. Of Hispanic women, 28.9 percent were uninsured in 2007, compared to 30.8 in 2006, and 29.6 in 2005. Of Asian women, 15.7 percent were uninsured in 2007, compared to 14.5 percent in 2006, and 16.6 in 2005.

Compare that data with the statistics on men: Of white men, 11.3 percent were uninsured in 2007, compared to 12.0 percent, in 2006 and 11.8 percent in 2005. Of Black men, 21.4 percent were uninsured in 2007, compared to 22.6 in 2006 and 20.9 in 2005. Of Hispanic men, 35.1 percent were uninsured in 2007, compared to 37.2 percent in 2006 and 34.9 percent in 2005. Of Asian men, 18.1 percent were uninsured in 2007, compared to 16.6 percent in 2006 and 17.7 percent in 2005.

The Census data released today demonstrate that women continue to be more dependent on public insurance than men. People of color, and certainly women of color, face marked disparities in accessing health care coverage.

While these trends are affecting both men and women of all races and ethnicities, women are the health care decision-makers and care coordinators for their families. Women are keenly aware of the challenges of keeping a family healthy during these times of economic insecurity and understand the critical importance of public insurance programs like SCHIP in keeping children healthy. Women understand that health care means safety and security for their families, and that we face an urgent need to ensure that all family members -- our parents and spouses, as well as our kids -- have access to quality, affordable health care.

For more information on RWV's efforts on health care disparities and affordability, please see our fact sheets and talking points on [www.raisingwomensvoices.net](http://www.raisingwomensvoices.net).

**Raising Women's Voices is a collaborative initiative of  
the Avery Institute for Social Change,  
the MergerWatch Project of Community Catalyst  
and the National Women's Health Network**