

Fact SHEET

From
Minority
Health
Initiatives

Health Coverage in Communities of Color: Talking about the New Census Numbers

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In August 2008, the U.S. Census Bureau released the latest numbers on income, poverty, and health coverage. The number of Americans living without health coverage in 2007 is considerably higher than it was in 2000, and communities of color continue to bear the brunt of this crisis. In 2000, the number of uninsured was 38.4 million. In 2007, that number had risen to 45.7 million, with people of color accounting for more than half of those without health coverage.

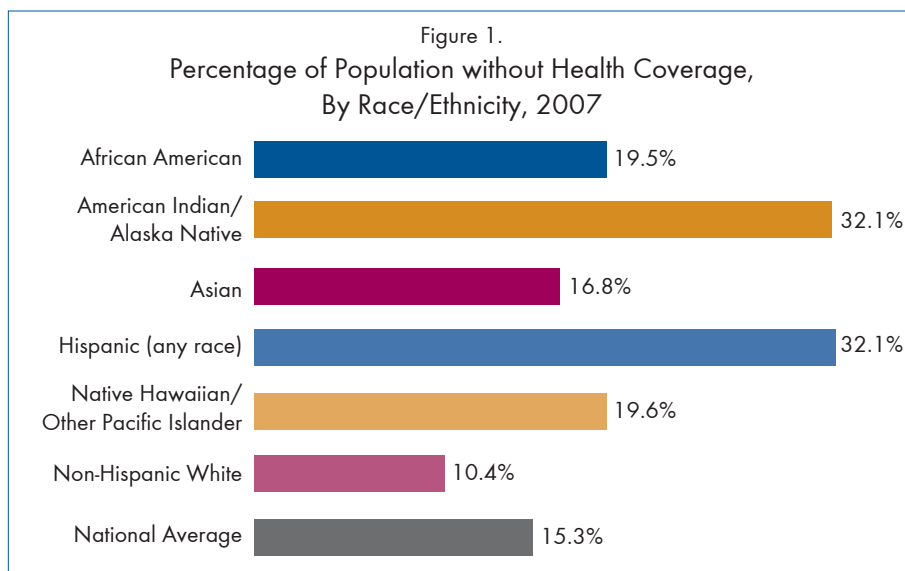
Although the number of uninsured individuals decreased by 1.3 million from 2006 to 2007, the numbers alone don't tell the whole story. While the number of people without coverage fell for the first time since 2000, the number of people covered by employer-based health insurance also fell. In 2000, 64.2 percent of Americans received their health coverage through their employers. In 2007, that number had fallen to 59.3 percent. Government health insurance programs saw an increase in enrollment in 2007 and provided an important safety net for those who had lost coverage. Medicaid, for instance, had an enrollment increase of 1.3 million, to a total of 39.6 million. Well over 20 million of those enrollees were racial and ethnic minorities.

Today, more than one in three Americans identifies him or herself as African American, Asian American, Hispanic/Latino, American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, or Other Pacific Islander, and together, they make up the "minority." But by 2042, this "minority" is expected to become the majority, which will raise the visibility of issues confronting communities of color and the importance of developing appropriate solutions.

Racial and ethnic health disparities continue to plague the nation – from differences in access, quality, and coverage, to gaps in disease rates and health outcomes. The causes of these disparities are broad and complex, ranging from societal issues like poverty and racism, to health system factors such as access to health care facilities. One of the most glaring inequities facing people of color, however, is lack of health coverage. So, as conversations about health reform continue to take center stage, it is important to consider the following:

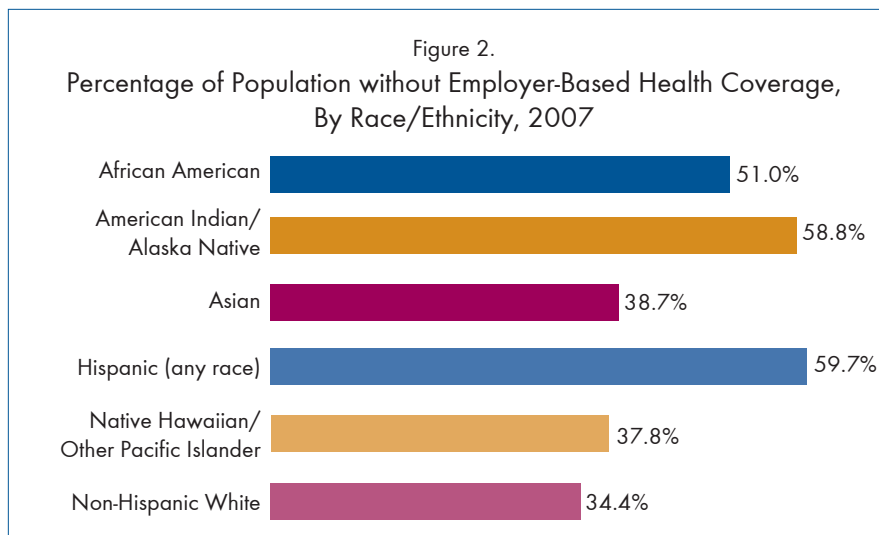
People of color are more likely to lack health coverage.

Although communities of color make up only 34 percent of the population, they account for 55 percent of the uninsured. Every racial and ethnic group has uninsured rates that are higher than non-Hispanic whites and higher than the national average (Figure 1).



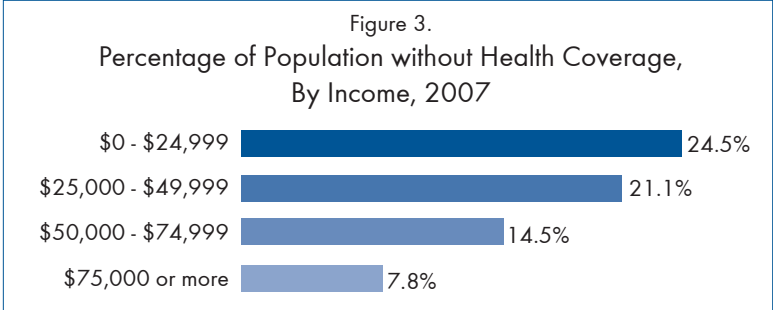
Although people of color are just as likely to be employed as non-Hispanic whites, they are more likely to have jobs that don't offer health coverage.

More than half of African American, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Hispanic workers were not covered by employer-based health insurance in 2007 (Figure 2).



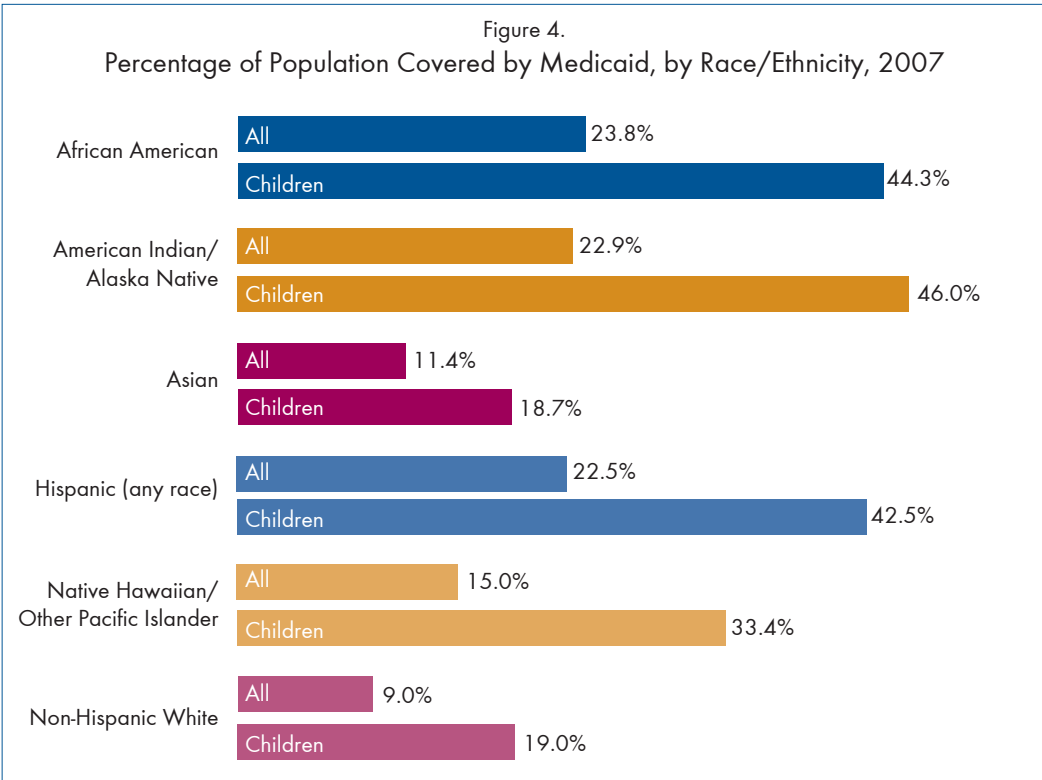
The lower your income, the less likely you are to have health coverage (Figure 3). This means less access to health care for communities of color.

As a whole, people of color earn less than non-Hispanic whites, and the likelihood of having access to employer-based coverage is significantly less. For instance, last year, African Americans earned 62 percent (\$33,916) of the median income of non-Hispanic whites (\$54,920), while Hispanics earned 70 percent (\$38,679).



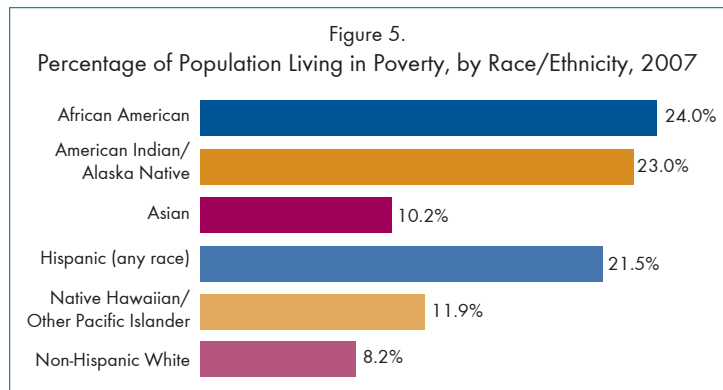
Public health insurance programs provide a key source of coverage for communities of color.

In 2007, Medicaid provided coverage for a disproportionate percentage of nearly every racial and ethnic group, particularly children (Figure 4).



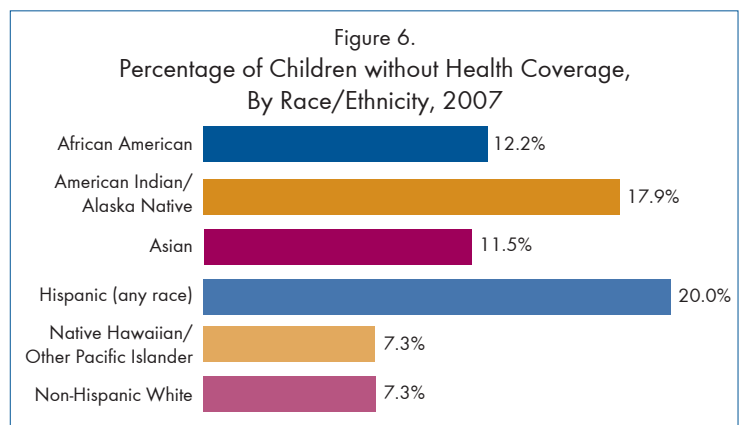
Communities of color account for more than half of those living in poverty, which limits access to health coverage and leads to poor health outcomes.

In 2007, 37.3 million people were living in poverty. Although people of color accounted for one-third of the U.S. population, they made up well over half of those living in poverty – 57 percent. Daily exposure to poor social conditions contributes to poor overall health. Rates of poverty for nearly every racial and ethnic group were disproportionately higher than they were for non-Hispanic whites (Figure 5).



All children deserve a healthy start in life. However, children of color are more likely to lack health coverage.

In 2007, there were 8.1 million uninsured children in the U.S., and more than 5 million of them were children of color. Children in nearly every racial and ethnic group were more likely to be uninsured than non-Hispanic white children (Figure 6).



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2007*, available online at <http://www.census.gov/prod/2008pubs/p60-235.pdf>.

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