

## Health Care Reform: Critical to Closing the Gap for Communities of Color

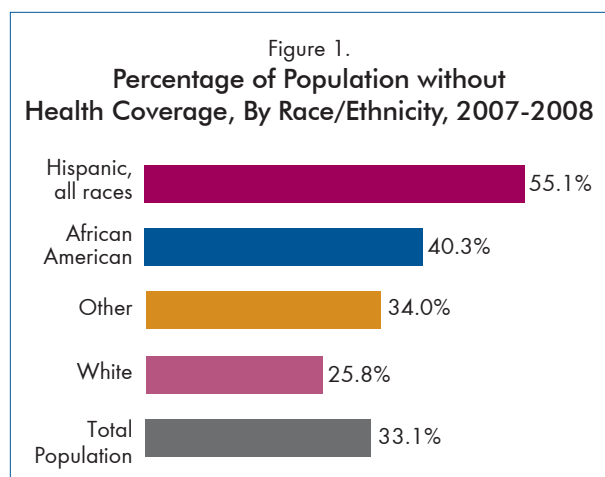
As more Americans find themselves uninsured and health care costs continue to rise, health care reform has become a top domestic priority for policymakers, the public, and the Obama Administration. The dialogue around health reform presents an historic opportunity to address fundamental inequities in the health care system and to ultimately eliminate the racial and ethnic health disparities that continue to plague the nation.

People of color in the United States are more likely than whites to lack health insurance, to receive lower-quality care, and to suffer from worse 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. In order to significantly close this gap, health care reform proposals must include strategies that increase access to quality, affordable health coverage for all.

New data show that 86.7 million people—one out of every three Americans under the age of 65—were uninsured for some period of time during 2007-2008.<sup>1</sup> However, a closer look at the numbers reveals alarming racial and ethnic disparities in health coverage.

### People of color were more likely to lack coverage.

- ◆ Almost half (45.8 percent) of people of color under the age of 65 went without health coverage for some or all of the two-year period 2007-2008.
- ◆ The numbers were even more alarming when broken down by race and ethnicity: More than half of Hispanics/Latinos (55.1 percent), two out of five African Americans (40.3 percent), and one-third of other racial and ethnic minorities<sup>2</sup> (34 percent) were uninsured, compared to one-quarter of whites (25.8 percent) (see Figure 1).

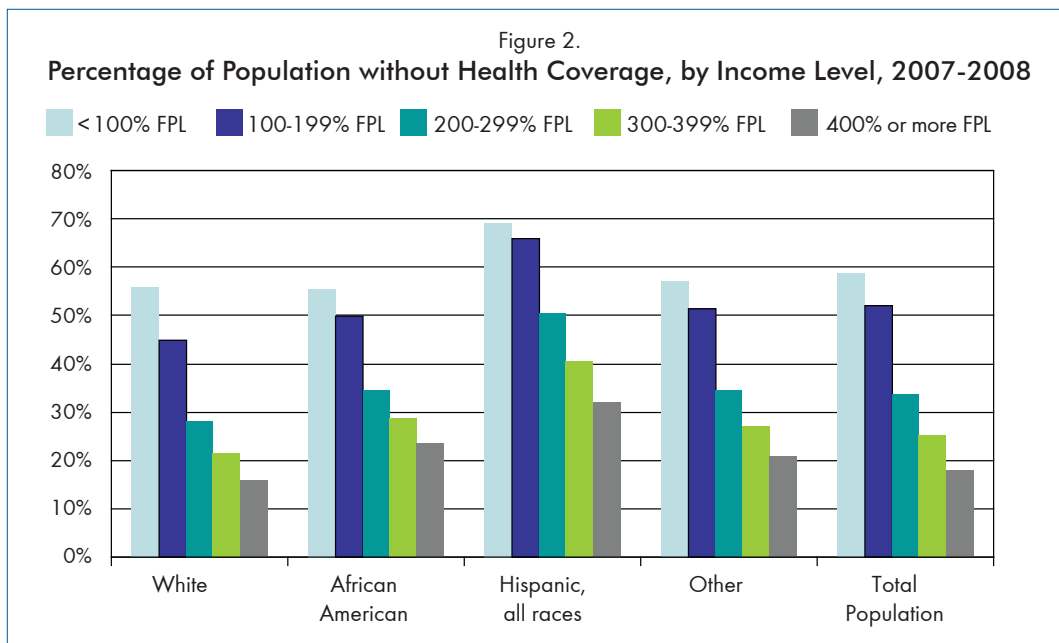


## People of color were uninsured for significant periods of time.

- ◆ More than 80 percent of Hispanics/Latinos were uninsured for six months or more. Taken together, more than three-quarters of people of color (76.5 percent) were uninsured for six months or more.

## Income matters—but so do race and ethnicity.

- ◆ Not surprisingly, individuals with lower incomes are more likely to be uninsured. This is true for all racial and ethnic groups.
- ◆ However, disparities in coverage persist even as income increases. For example, families earning more than \$84,800 annually were more likely to be uninsured if they were racial and ethnic minorities. In this income group, almost one-third of Hispanics/Latinos (32 percent), nearly one-fourth of African Americans (23.6 percent), and one-fifth of other racial and ethnic minorities (20.8 percent) lacked coverage, compared to 16 percent of whites (see Figure 2).



These findings indicate that expanding access to quality, affordable health coverage will go a long way toward reducing racial and ethnic health disparities. But while health coverage is necessary, it is not sufficient to fully closing the gap. Health care reform proposals must also take into account the unique social, economic, and cultural needs of communities of color and include strategies to effectively care for this rapidly growing population.

<sup>1</sup> The data in this fact sheet are meant to supplement the most recent Census Bureau data, which found that 45.7 million people were uninsured for the entire 2007 calendar year. These new data count individuals who did not have health coverage for all or part of the two-year period 2007-2008.

<sup>2</sup> “Other” refers to those that identify as Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, American Indian/ Alaska Native, or as a member of more than one group.