As health care costs and insurance rates in the United States continue to rise, health insurance coverage is an increasingly popular topic in the local community, national debates, and the media. This is true within the realm of population and demographic researchers as well. For this issue of *Population Notes*, we take a brief look at health insurance coverage nationally and within the state of Wisconsin.

National surveys, such as the U.S. Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey (CPS), are a good source of information on health and health insurance. The 2008 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement provides survey answers for 78,000 households throughout the United States. When asked about health insurance coverage in 2007, 85% of individuals included in the survey had health insurance coverage, while 15% did not have health insurance coverage. When considering age, 2% of seniors lacked health insurance, 11% of those under the age of 18 were reported as uninsured, and 20% of those ages 18-64 reported not having health insurance coverage (Chart 1).

The Current Population Survey also provides survey results by state for the entire United States. (Data are not available for smaller geographies.) Of those sampled in Wisconsin, 92% of individuals were insured, and 8% of the survey respondents were uninsured. Six percent of Wisconsinites under the age of 18 included in the survey were uninsured. Of the individuals in the survey 65 and older, less than 1% were uninsured. It is important to note that the CPS survey cannot be generalized to the broader...
population when results have particularly small numbers, such as the number of uninsured people 65 and older in Wisconsin.

As the examination of age and health insurance shows, lack of health insurance coverage is not distributed equally across all populations. As might be expected, there is much variation in percent uninsured between different income-to-poverty ratio categories (Chart 2, p. 1). In the US population, the percent of uninsured goes down as the income-to-poverty ratio gets larger. However, this is not true of the Wisconsin population. The percent of uninsured in the 50-100% income-to-poverty ratio category is substantially smaller than percent found in the less than 50% income-to-poverty ratio. This is a marked contrast to the distribution found in the US population.

Another interesting finding is that a higher percentage of males are uninsured compared to females (Chart 3). The US and Wisconsin are relatively comparable in this respect.

Finally, there are very large difference in percent uninsured when we examine the population by race (Chart 4). Non-Hispanic whites are the best-insured racial group. Hispanics are the least insured group shown. There are similarities between the shapes of the US and Wisconsin, as seen in Chart 3. However, the Other race group in Wisconsin is much higher relative to the other race groups than it is for the US. Much of this is attributable to the American Indian population in Wisconsin, which has a high proportion of uninsured people. However, we should point out once again that these percentages in particular are based on small numbers, so they must be interpreted conservatively.


While the CPS provides a good glimpse at health insurance coverage on a state and national level, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services website provides several avenues for collecting more localized state, region, and county data on health insurance status. In addition, some of the survey data is used to create estimates of the actual population of uninsured residents. These reports are available at http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/stats/healthinsurance.htm. A report on the 2006 Family Health Survey indicates that around 11% of Wisconsin residents, or 570,000 residents, were without health insurance for at least part of 2006, and 5% of Wisconsin residents were without insurance for all of 2006. Regionally, the Northern and Western regions of the state had the highest percentage of year-round uninsured individuals at around 6% in 2006.
STAFF SPOTLIGHT: DAN VEROFF

Although he can barely believe it, Dan Veroff has been with the Applied Population Laboratory for more than ten years and has been director since 2001. Much of Dan’s work over the years has focused on doing outreach and education about census data and census partnership programs along with providing access to demographic data and other informational resources for community development and planning to UW Extension educators and specialists (who sometimes refer to him as a census geek). He has been actively involved in the State Data Center network and in 2007 was elected to serve on the national Steering Committee. On the Steering Committee, Dan strives to represent the perspectives and needs of data users of all experience levels and to advocate for more and better data for rural communities.

Reflecting his background in community development and neighborhood work, Dan has maintained a strong interest in how information and knowledge are used in community decision making and visioning processes. His ongoing research explores ways to build capacity in communities and neighborhoods by using participatory methods to build better community information systems, with particular emphasis on using maps and emerging GIS techniques to integrate local knowledge and other qualitative data.

In 2007, Dan spent six months living in a small city in Mexico, learning Spanish and soaking up the sights, sounds, and flavors. His experience there encouraged him to get involved with efforts in the APL to explore patterns of recent immigration from Mexico to Wisconsin and the cultural “learning” that is happening as Latinos become part of rural communities in Wisconsin.

His colleagues in the APL forgive him (begrudgingly) for being an avid Michigan Wolverine fan.

ON THE HORIZON

Wisconsin fall school enrollment counts, September 19, 2007. This marks the date that districts can begin to send the APL their numbers for fall enrollment projections projects.

National States Geographic Information Council (NSGIC) Conference, September 7-11, 2008, Keystone, CO.

Wisconsin Towns Association (WTA) Convention, October 5-8, 2008, Appleton, WI.


Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA) Annual Conference, October 12-14, 2008, Wisconsin Dells, WI.

League of Wisconsin Municipalities Annual Conference, October 22-24, 2008, Stevens Point, WI.

ESRI Wisconsin User Group (EWUG) Conference, October 29-30, 2008, Appleton, WI.

Southern Demographic Association Annual Meeting, October 30 – November 1, 2008, Greenville, SC.
APL PROJECTS: PUBLIC HEALTH

In the past two years the APL has been adding geographic expertise to a number of studies of public health. APL staff members have been working with two of the clinic networks in Dane County to map and visualize patient population trends both for the purpose of management level decision making, but also to investigate questions about geographic patterning in public health. The APL has also played a role within the Survey of the Health of Wisconsin (SHOW) project run by Dr. Javier Nieto in the Department of Population Health Studies. Again, the use of GIS and geographic analysis has been leveraged to produce the sampling frame for the project, as well as to support the initial household sampling list creation. Furthering the APL’s involvement with health related work, APL staff members are active participants in multiple research groups, along with participants from Public Health Madison/Dane County, the Department of Family Medicine and the Department of Landscape Architecture. Within these groups, the APL has provided expertise on the application and use of geographic analysis to facilitate the research goals of the group.

FROM THE DIRECTOR’S DESK

As the 2008 Presidential election campaigns start revving up in earnest, we thought it would be appropriate to focus this issue of Population Notes on community health and health insurance – topics that figure to be key points of debate and discussion in this election cycle. As our feature article shows, there is quite a lot of health insurance related data available from federal and state sources. In Wisconsin, there is also a lot of powerful information on local health conditions available from state agencies and from the Department of Population Health Sciences on the UW–Madison campus. Over the last few years, the Applied Population Laboratory has gotten involved in a range of projects that are assessing and examining community health in Wisconsin from the perspectives of epidemiology, clinical practice, and public health. Because these efforts focus on population and space (or place), they use the full range of APL’s in-house tools and techniques and result in applied demography at its finest. Even more exciting is that our work on these projects has allowed us to think about how to weave together mapping and community-based participation to add local knowledge and other qualitative data to community health analysis and information systems. This is a fine example of interdisciplinary collaboration and because we have just started to scratch the surface, we expect to take on more of these community health related projects that are at the intersection of applied demography, geographic information systems, community development, public health, and clinical practice. Please let us know if you are interested in hearing more about our current projects.

Regards, Dan