



Highlights from SHADAC's 7th Annual Current Population Survey (CPS) Conference Call

September 2009

On September 11, 2009, the State Health Access Data Assistance Center (SHADAC) hosted a conference call featuring Charles Nelson, Assistant Division Chief for Income, Poverty and Health Statistics, Housing and Household Economic Statistics Division at the U.S. Census Bureau. Nelson discussed the recently issued findings from the Current Population Survey's Annual Social and Economic Supplement (CPS), published in the September 2009 report, [Income, Poverty and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2008](#) by Carmen DeNavas-Walt, Bernadette D. Proctor, and Jessica C. Smith. State-level estimates are not available in the main report, but they are available on the Census Bureau's web page for [health insurance coverage in 2008](#).

Sixty-seven state health policy and data analysts representing 26 states, 2 federal agencies, and 8 research groups participated in the conference call.

Major Findings

- Estimates show a slight increase in the number of uninsured:
 - 46.3 million people were uninsured in 2008, up from 45.7 million in 2007.
 - 15.4% were uninsured in 2008, up from 15.3% in 2007.
- Health insurance coverage among children improved:
 - 7.3 million children were uninsured in 2008, down from 8.1 million in 2007.
 - 9.9% were uninsured in 2008, down from 11.0% in 2007

By Type of Coverage

- There is a continued trend in the shift from private to government-based coverage:
 - 66.7% (201.0 million) had private health insurance coverage in 2008, down from 67.5% (202.0 million) in 2007.
 - 58.5% (176.3 million) had employer-sponsored coverage in 2008, down from 59.3% (177.4 million) in 2007.
 - 29.0% (87.4 million) had government-sponsored coverage in 2008, up from 27.8% (83.0 million) in 2007.
 - 14.1% (42.6 million) had Medicaid/SCHIP coverage in 2008, up from 13.2% (39.6 million) in 2007.

By Economic Status

- 17.2% (20.9 million) of full-time workers did not have health insurance in 2008, reflecting a percentage increase from 17.0% in 2007, but a decline in number (21.1 million) from 2007.
- 25.4% (6.9 million) of part-time workers did not have health insurance in 2008, up from 23.4% (5.8 million) in 2007.

By Region & States

- Among the [U.S. Census Regions](#), the Midwest and Northeast had the lowest uninsurance rate in 2008 (11.6% each), followed by the West (17.4%), and the South (18.2%). The rate of uninsurance increased significantly from 2007 to 2008 in the West region.
- Comparing across states using three-year average uninsurance rates for 2006–2008, states with the lowest rates of uninsurance include Massachusetts (7.1%), Hawaii (8.1%), Minnesota (8.7%), and Wisconsin (8.9%). States with the highest uninsurance rates include Texas (24.9%), New Mexico (23.0%), Florida (20.5%), and Louisiana (20.1%).
- Comparing within states using two-year uninsurance rate averages (2005-2006 versus 2007-2008), states that had a significant *decrease* in uninsurance include Massachusetts (4.4% decrease), Utah (3.9% decrease), Alabama (2.9% decrease), District of Columbia (2.6% decrease) and Oklahoma (2.5% decrease).
- Comparing within states using two-year uninsurance rate averages (2005-2006 versus 2007-2008), states that had a significant *increase* in uninsurance include Alaska (2.1% increase), Michigan (1.3% increase), and Texas (1.1% increase).

Measurement Issues

Health Insurance Coverage

The 2008 health insurance coverage estimates do not have any methodological changes from 2007. Note that two changes in 2007 still apply (see last year's conference call summary available at: http://www.shadac.org/files/CPS2007Summary_Sep2008.pdf).

Poverty Calculation

In the past few years there has been increased interest in modernizing the poverty measure used by the federal government. The Census Bureau will be releasing experimental poverty estimates using a modernized measure in the near future. A bill to make a modernized measure the official poverty estimate has been introduced in Congress, although it has not been passed by either the House or Senate.

Comments by Mike Davern

Replicate Weights

The Census Bureau has constructed a set of replicate weights for each of the CPS data files from 2005-2009 and we hope they will release them soon. When they are available, the replicate weights will provide more accurate standard error estimation than what is currently available for the public use data. These weights are not currently included in the public use microsample data but SHADAC will notify call attendees if and when they become available. For detailed information, refer to Davern, M., A. Jones, Jr., J. Lepkowski, G. Davidson, and L.A. Blewett. "Estimating Standard Errors for Regression Using the Current Population Survey's Public Use File." *Inquiry*, 44(2): 211-224. This paper is available at: <http://www.inquiryjournalonline.org/pdfserv/i0046-9580-044-02-0211.pdf>. SHADAC will develop a technical brief from this paper in fall of 2009.

American Community Survey (ACS)

Some information on the ACS is available in advance of the data release, including SHADAC's issue brief, "An Introduction to the American Community Survey Health Insurance Coverage Estimates": <http://www.shadac.org/files/shadac/publications/IssueBrief18.pdf>.

Also see the "ACS Resources" links on page 5 of this document.

Summary of Conference Call Questions and Answers

- **Q:** Will the CPS state-level health insurance coverage estimates differ from the ACS estimates?
A: At this time we can't say because the ACS data are not released. Due to the variety methodological differences, however, we would logically expect to see different estimates. We also can't advise on which estimate will be best, although we believe that the larger sample size of the ACS will provide less variance. However, the ACS does not have the time trend provided by the CPS. Researchers at the Census Bureau and SHADAC will work to help state analysts to understand the estimates from both surveys and how to use them.
- **Q:** How accurate will the ACS sub-state estimates be compared to the Small Area Health Insurance Estimates (SAHIE).
A: SAHIE estimates are model-based, while ACS provides estimates from the survey itself without additional modeling. Initially the SAHIE estimates will be more reliable because SAHIE includes estimates for all counties, whereas this first year of ACS will only include larger population areas (population over 65,000). The ACS sub-state estimates will become more reliable in time as ACS multi-year estimates are released. Again, researchers from the Census Bureau and SHADAC will help analysts choose the appropriate estimates for your needs.
- **Q:** What health insurance variables will be available in American Factfinder or the ACS Public Use Microdata(PUMS)?
A: A very limited number of tables will be published in American Factfinder by the Census Bureau for the first year of the ACS. However, all items asked in the questionnaire will be available in the PUMS for independent analysis.
The survey questionnaires for each year are available at:
<http://www.census.gov/acs/www/SBasics/SQuest/SQuest1.htm>.
The data dictionary for 2007 is at:
<http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Products/PUMS/pumsdict.html>
- **Q:** Nationwide the children's uninsurance estimates have declined. Are a handful of states driving this trend?
A: We haven't looked specifically at this but in all likelihood it is not driven by a few states. For example, a state with a large population may have a decline that is not significant but consistent over time. This would have a large impact on the nationwide estimates compared to a small state that shows significant declines.
- **Q:** Will the ACS become the new standard for health insurance estimates?
A: There is no official directive to make the ACS the new standard, although the CHIPRA legislation calls for the Census Bureau to evaluate the ACS in this capacity. Any formal change will require an extensive analysis and involve stakeholders to determine what works best.
- **Q:** In the ACS what age breakouts will be available.
A: The summary tables will include 0-17, 18-64, and 65+. The PUMS will age as a continuous variable, with age top-coded at different values by state (generally around age 90).
- **Q:** What methodological differences between the ACS and CPS will lead to better ACS estimates?
A: The main benefit of the ACS will be the larger sample size for each state. This will produce more robust estimates. There are several other methodological differences that may or may

not make the ACS a better measure. The main differences are mode, location of the question in the survey, and wording of the question itself. A summary description of the ACS is in SHADAC's new issue brief, "An Introduction to the American Community Survey Health Insurance Coverage Estimates," available at: <http://www.shadac.org/files/shadac/publications/IssueBrief18.pdf>.

- **Q:** What level of detail will be available on the ACS PUMS file?
A: The Census Bureau has a PUMS web page, available at: <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Products/PUMS/pumsdict.html>. The data dictionary is probably the best compilation of variables (note that at this time the 2008 dictionary is not posted). The IPUMS web site also provides a good description of the geographic detail available in the ACS, available at: <http://usa.ipums.org/usa-action/variableDescription.do?mnemonic=PUMA>.
- **Q:** For how many years will the CPS replicate weights be available?
A: SHADAC has been told that the weights will become available for the 2005-2009 CPS ASEC (health insurance estimates for calendar years 2004-2008).
- **Q:** Is the SCHIP universe change applied in 2007 still applicable in 2008?
A: Yes. There were no methodological changes from 2007 to 2008.
- **Q:** Are the 2008 CPS sample sizes available by state?
A: SHADAC has an Excel file with sample sizes (household and individual) available at: <http://www.shadac.org/publications/cps-sample-size>
- **Q:** We were surprised that the uninsurance estimate had such a slight change. With the recession we expected to see a much higher count. Do you have any thoughts on this?
A: We don't have any answers on that, but it could be due to a number of things. Our foremost thought is that there is probably a lag in timing between when people lost their job versus their health insurance coverage, or perhaps the impact didn't really hit until 2009.
- **Q:** Regarding the number of uninsured, a figure of 30 million is often quoted. Do you know how this is calculated, and is this a calculation that we should be using?
A: The 30 million count (or "more than 30 million") bases the qualification on citizenship and is described in this blog by the Office of Management and Budget, referring to 36.8 uninsured native and naturalized citizens. The blog is at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/blog/09/09/10/CountingtheUninsured46MillionorMorethan30Million/>. The calculation is based in a Kaiser Family Foundation issue paper, "Characteristics of the Uninsured: Who is Eligible for Public Coverage and Who Needs Help Affording Coverage?" authored by John Holahan, Allison Cook, and Lisa Dubay of the Urban Institute. The issue paper is at: <http://www.kff.org/uninsured/upload/7613.pdf>
- **Q:** Does the ACS have any questions on immigration status?
A: No. The ACS, like the CPS, asks citizenship and nativity but does not specifically ask about the legal status of immigration. A researcher at the Pew Research Center has conducted estimations of the illegal immigrant community in the U.S. using the CPS, "A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States," available at: <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/107.pdf>

CPS Resources:

- U.S Census Bureau's report, "Income, Poverty and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2008": <http://www.census.gov/prod/2009pubs/p60-236.pdf>
- Additional health insurance coverage estimates for 2008, by state: <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/hlthins/hlthin08.html>
- Davern, et al. paper on replicate weights, "Estimating Standard Errors for Regression Using the Current Population Survey's Public Use File." *Inquiry*, 44(2): 211-224: <http://www.inquiryjournalonline.org/pdfserv/i0046-9580-044-02-0211.pdf>.
- CPS sample size by state: <http://www.shadac.org/publications/cps-sample-size>
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation issue brief (2009 update), "Comparing Federal Government Surveys that Count Uninsured People in America": http://www.shadac.org/files/shadac/publications/ComparingFedSurveys_2009.pdf (this will be updated on September 22 to include the ACS estimates).
- Office of Management and Budget blog referring to 36.8 uninsured native and naturalized citizens: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/blog/09/09/10/CountingtheUninsured46MillionorMorethan30Million/>.
- Kaiser Family Foundation issue paper, "Characteristics of the Uninsured: Who is Eligible for Public Coverage and Who Needs Help Affording Coverage?" : <http://www.kff.org/uninsured/upload/7613.pdf>
- Pew Research Center report: "A Portrait of Unauthorized Immigrants in the United States": <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/61.pdf>

ACS Resources:

- SHADAC's issue brief, "An Introduction to the American Community Survey Health Insurance Coverage Estimates": <http://www.shadac.org/files/shadac/publications/IssueBrief18.pdf>
- ACS PUMS data dictionary: <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Products/PUMS/pumsdict.html>
- IPUMS.org description of the geographic detail available in the ACS: <http://usa.ipums.org/usa-action/variableDescription.do?mnemonic=PUMA>
- ACS Questionnaires: <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/SBasics/SQuest/SQuest1.htm>
- ACS main web page: <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/>

SHADAC Web Site Resources:

SHADAC's Federal Survey Resource Pages are located at: <http://www.shadac.org/content/cpsfederal-data-technical-assistance>