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Understanding U.S. Census Bureau Data on Poverty and Uninsured

On two dates in September, the U. S. Census Bureau will release 2011 data on poverty, income, and the number of uninsured. On September 12, the Bureau will release health insurance, poverty, and income data from the Current Population Survey (CPS). On September 20, the Bureau will release additional health insurance, poverty, and income data from the American Community Survey (ACS). Although the data from these two surveys are similar, they do differ in important ways and will likely yield somewhat different numbers.

Apples and Oranges

Although the data will be similar, you should not compare the CPS data to the ACS data (i.e., do not compare local uninsured rates from the ACS to statewide uninsured rates from the CPS). The surveys ask different questions at different times of the year to different populations.

The key differences are as follows (for more details, visit the Census Bureau's CPS vs. ACS [website](#)):

- The way the two surveys ask about health insurance (i.e., if you had it at any point in the previous year versus if you have insurance today)
- Whether military health insurance coverage is represented as private or public/government insurance
- Annual U.S. sample sizes: CPS = 100,000 addresses vs. ACS = 3 million addresses.
- What geographic level of data is available (i.e., CPS only provides state-level data, while the one-year ACS estimates provide data on areas with more than 65,000 people, including Congressional Districts, metro areas, and some counties.)

Use CPPP as a Resource to Help Make Sense of the Numbers

The Center for Public Policy Priorities is a Texas-based non-profit, non-partisan policy institute. On Sept. 12 and 20, we will:

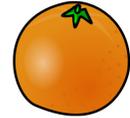
1. Issue a statement following the release of the initial numbers.
2. Hold a press conference call for members of the media only on each release date to help provide context and interpretation of the numbers. To register for the press conference call, please contact Brian Stephens at stephens@cphp.org or 512-823-2871.
3. Release more detailed analyses, examining age, race/ethnicity, and other nuances of the broader uninsured and poverty numbers in the days following the release.

WHEN IS IT BEST TO USE

the Current Population Survey or the American Community Survey?



CPS vs. ACS



RELEASED SEPT. 12

RELEASED SEPT. 20

WE RECOMMEND USING THE CPS FOR:



NATIONAL & STATE-LEVEL HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE DATA

Key Facts about the CPS:

- Data only available for U.S. and States
- Asks: whether the person had health insurance at any time during 2011
 - “Uninsured” = no health insurance for all of 2011
 - “Insured” = had health insurance at any point in the year, even for a short period of time. Subcategories include:
 - Private insurance = employment-based coverage, union-based coverage, or insurance purchased independently from an insurance company.
 - Government insurance = insurance through public insurance programs (e.g., Medicaid, Medicare, CHIP), or any military-based healthcare (i.e., TRICARE, VA, or other military health care).
- Data over time: 1987-2011

WE RECOMMEND USING THE ACS FOR:



HEALTH INSURANCE DATA FOR STATE AND SUB-STATE AREAS OF 65,000 OR MORE

Key Facts about ACS Health Insurance Data:

- Health insurance coverage data for states, as well as geographic areas with populations of 65,000 or more (including 50 Texas counties, all U.S. Congressional Districts, and all 25 Texas metropolitan areas)
- Asks: whether individuals had health insurance at the time they were surveyed
 - “Uninsured” = didn’t have insurance at the time survey was completed
 - “Insured” = had insurance at the time survey was completed. Subcategories include:
 - Private = employment- or union-based coverage, insurance purchased independently from an insurance company, or TRICARE or other active military health care coverage.
 - Public = coverage through public insurance programs (e.g., Medicaid, Medicare, CHIP), or through the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- This question was asked for the first time in 2008, so longitudinal data are only available for 2008-2011.



NATIONAL, STATE, AND LOCAL-LEVEL POVERTY AND INCOME DATA

Key Facts about the ACS Population, Income, and Poverty Data:

- Population data
 - Average family size
 - Poverty rates by age, race/ethnicity, gender, and educational attainment
 - Median income for families or non-family households, and by race/ethnicity or age
 - Housing costs as a percentage of income
- Data available for the state, as well as geographic areas with populations of 65,000 or more, including:
 - 50 Texas counties,
 - all U.S. Congressional Districts, and
 - all 25 Texas Metropolitan Areas
- Data over time: 2001-2011

For More Information

For more information or to request an interview, please contact Brian Stephens at stephens@cphp.org or 512.320.0222, ext. 112.

About the Center

The Center for Public Policy Priorities is a nonpartisan, nonprofit policy institute committed to improving public policies to make a better Texas. You can learn more about the Center at CPPP.org.

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