



September 2011

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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 data on poverty, income, and the number of uninsured. On September 13, the Bureau will release health insurance, poverty, and income data from the Current Population Survey (CPS). On September 22, 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 webpage](#)):

- 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 goes down to state-level, while ACS goes down to areas above 65,000, 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. 13 and 22, we will:

1. Issue a general statement early in the day regarding the initial numbers;
2. Release more detailed analyses, examining age, race/ethnicity, and other nuances of the broader uninsured and poverty numbers later in the day; and
3. Be available for interviews to help provide context and interpretation of the numbers.

Also note that, unlike in years past, the Census Bureau will not be releasing embargoed data early to the press or any other organization. Everyone (press and research organizations alike) will be allowed access to the data at the same time.



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## For National and State-level Health Insurance Coverage Data, We Recommend Using Sept. 13 CPS.

### Key Facts about the CPS:

- Data only available for U.S. and States
- Asks: whether the person had health insurance *at any time during 2010*
  - “Uninsured” = no health insurance for all of 2010
  - “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: 1987-2010

## For Health Insurance Data for State and Sub-state Areas of 65,000 or More, We Recommend Using Sept. 22 ACS.

### Key Facts about the Health Insurance Data from the ACS:

- 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, 2009, and 2010.

## For National, State, and Local-level Poverty and Income Data, We Recommend Using Sept 22 ACS.

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

- 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: 2001-2010