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Stubborn Issues for Iowa: Poverty, Stagnant Income and Insurance *1 in 9 Iowans Lack Health Insurance in 2010-11*

IOWA CITY, Iowa (Sept. 12, 2012) — New Census data illustrate stubborn issues for Iowans in gaining health insurance coverage and better incomes, and breaking free of poverty.

According to the Census' Current Population Survey (CPS) data released Wednesday, on average in 2010 and 2011, 11.1 percent of Iowans were uninsured throughout the year— one out of every nine Iowans.

Among Iowans under age 65, the figure was more daunting — 12.6 percent, nearly 329,500 people — up starkly over a decade. The measure represented a 4 percentage-point increase from 2000-01.

"We have watched the problem of access to health insurance grow through the years. Public policy — such as the Affordable Care Act — can be expected to ease this issue, but we can see it doesn't happen overnight," said Peter Fisher, research director for the Iowa Policy Project, part of the Iowa Fiscal Partnership.

"When over 300,000 people cannot get health insurance in our state, it is no time to be turning back efforts to increase access."

Census will release another set of information on Thursday, Sept. 20, from a separate, larger survey that is considered a better measure of state-level and local-level data.

Specific estimates for Iowa from the new CPS data, using two-year averages of information (see box at right):

Health Insurance

- Overall, 11.1 percent of Iowans were estimated, on average in 2010-11, to have no public or private health insurance coverage. This is up from 9.9 percent in 2008-09.
- For Iowans under age 65, 12.6 percent were uninsured, on average, in 2010-11 — up from 8.6 percent in 2000-01. That represents 329,489 people, up from 211,489 in 2000-01.



The Census release today was for 2011 estimates from the **Current Population Survey (CPS)**, the nation's primary source of statistics on labor force characteristics. It annually surveys about 100,000 addresses.

On Thursday, Sept. 20, Census will release one-year estimates from the 2011 **American Community Survey (ACS)**, which is the nation's largest household survey, with about 3 million addresses surveyed each year.

Both surveys produce data about poverty, income and health insurance. There are some important points about the types of data released in these reports to better understand them. In general terms, Census recommends use of ACS data for estimates of poverty and income at a point in time at the state level and for smaller geographical areas. CPS data, on the other hand, are better for long-term trends because CPS has been conducted by Census and the Bureau of Labor Statistics for more than 50 years. However, at the state level and below, the sample sizes are not considered large enough for single-year estimates, **so CPS state estimates are best viewed using two-year averages.**

Comparisons can be apples vs. oranges. Because the surveys are conducted differently, it is important not to compare data from one with the other — for example, it would be a mistake to look at how health coverage changed from 2001 using CPS, to 2011 using ACS.

- For Iowa kids under 18, there was not a marked change in insurance access over the decade, standing at 6.2 percent in 2010-11, from 5.3 percent estimated 10 years earlier.
- Medicaid coverage for kids under 18 stood at 31.1 percent in 2010-11 — almost 1 in 3 Iowa children, or 225,586 individuals — up from 14 percent in 2000-01.
- Medicaid coverage for all Iowans under 65 stood at 15.6 percent in 2010-11, more than twice as high as the 7.1 percent estimate for 2000-01.

“It should be pretty clear from these numbers — both for children specifically and all Iowans — that public health insurance programs including *hawk-i* for kids, Medicaid and Medicare, have kept things from getting much worse,” Fisher said.

Poverty

- Some 311,000 Iowans were in poverty in 2010-11, on average — a rate of 10.4 percent. That is significantly higher than the 7.8 percent estimate for 2000-01.

Income

- Median income stood relatively stable from 2000-01 to 2010-11, going from \$52,796 to \$50,391 for Iowa (2011 dollars). While lower, it does not represent a statistically significant change, but does illustrate Iowa’s income stagnation that has been documented in the past.

“Improving income has long been a challenge in Iowa. These data confirm we still have a long way to go,” Fisher said.

Iowa Fiscal Partnership analysts cautioned that the state-level information coming next week from the larger ACS can be expected to provide a better look at recent changes in health coverage in Iowa. But because ACS is a more recently developed survey and did not measure health coverage until 2008, CPS provides a better look at longer-term trends.

IFP is a joint public policy analysis initiative of two nonpartisan, nonprofit Iowa-based organizations, the Iowa Policy Project in Iowa City and the Child & Family Policy Center in Des Moines. Reports are at www.iowafiscal.org.

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