

Uninsured Veterans and Family Members: Who Are They and Where Do They Live?

Timely Analysis of Immediate Health Policy Issues

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In Summary

- An estimated one in 10 of the nation's 12.5 million nonelderly veterans report neither having insurance coverage, nor using Veterans Affairs care. Approximately 950,000 nonelderly members of their families are also uninsured. Uninsurance rates vary widely across states—from less than five percent to more than 17 percent.
- Forty-one percent of uninsured veterans report having unmet medical needs, while nearly 34 percent have delayed care due to cost.
- With the ACA's implementation, nearly half of uninsured veterans could have access to coverage through Medicaid expansions and another 40 percent could potentially qualify for subsidized coverage in newly created health insurance exchanges provided they do not have access to affordable employer-sponsored coverage.

Background

There is considerable public concern about the health and well-being of the estimated 13 million non-elderly veterans living in the United States. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides health care for many veterans through a system of medical centers, clinics, and other facilities, however, some veterans do not use VA health care services.

Uninsured Veterans and Their Families:

Of the estimated 12.5 million non-elderly veterans nationwide, 1.3 million, or just over one in 10, are uninsured and do not use VA services. In addition, an estimated 7.4 percent of veterans' non-elderly family members, or nearly 950,000 other adults and children, lack insurance coverage. Combined, there are an estimated 2.3 million uninsured veterans and family members, making up 4.8 percent of the nation's 47.3 million uninsured in 2010.

As with other groups of uninsured, uninsurance among veterans is associated with reduced access to health care. Nationally, 41.2 percent of uninsured veterans reported unmet medical needs, 39.5 percent reported unmet dental needs, and 33.7 percent reported delaying care due to cost. For all these indicators, uninsured veterans report significantly more unmet and delayed needs than their insured counterparts.

Compared with veterans who have coverage, uninsured veterans have served more recently, are younger, have lower levels of education, are less likely to be married, and report higher levels of unemployment and lower rates of full-time work. They are less likely than insured veterans to report service-

related disabilities, although more than 17 percent have a service-related disability or a functional limitation. In particular, their lower likelihood of being employed full-time and lower likelihood of being married probably contribute to their lack of coverage, as these attributes are characterized by reduced access to employer-sponsored insurance.

State Variation in Uninsurance Among Veterans and Family Members:

Uninsurance among veterans varies widely across states—from under five percent to more than 17 percent. Just four states have uninsurance rates below six percent—Massachusetts, Hawaii, Vermont and North Dakota. Meanwhile, four states—Louisiana, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana—have uninsurance rates above 14 percent. In general, state uninsurance rates for veterans, whether low or high, roughly correlate with uninsurance rates for their family members.

Higher uninsurance rates exist among veterans and their families in states that have taken only limited steps toward implementing health insurance exchanges under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). For veterans, the uninsurance rate is 12.3 percent in the group of states that have made the least progress with respect to exchange implementation, compared with 9.6 percent in the group of states that have made the most progress, and 9.8 percent in states that have achieved moderate progress. Overall, nearly 900,000 uninsured veterans and their family members live in states that have taken little or no action toward implementing insurance exchanges.

Impact of the ACA on Uninsurance Rates for Veterans:

Although the ACA does not change the VA or other military health care systems and is not targeted specifically at veterans, it includes a number of provisions aimed at increasing access to affordable coverage that could benefit veterans and their families. Nearly half (48.8%) of uninsured veterans will likely qualify for expanded Medicaid coverage, while another 40.1 percent have incomes that would allow them to qualify for subsidized coverage through state insurance exchanges, provided that they do not have access to affordable employer-sponsored insurance.

By reducing uninsurance, the ACA has the potential to increase access to needed health care, however, the extent of the success will depend on how aggressive ACA implementation and outreach is nationwide and will depend on timely enrollment of veterans and their family members in coverage.

