

Disability Statistics Abstract

Number 7

Health Insurance Coverage of People with Disabilities in the U.S.

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Lack of health insurance greatly impedes access to health care, a significant problem for people with disabilities, who often have high demand for health services. In 1989, an estimated 35.3 million Americans under age 65 lacked any kind of health insurance. Of those, 4.1 million (11.5%) were persons with disabilities. Included in this number are 547,000 children and adolescents under age 18.

These estimates and others presented here are based on data from the 1989 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS). For the purpose of this report, disability is defined as a limitation in activity due to chronic illness or impairment (see notes). Because Americans 65 and older are covered under Medicare, we limit our discussion to the population aged under 65.

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One uninsured person in nine has a disability

Type of Coverage

The vast majority (75.4%) of Americans under age 65 are covered by private insurance plans. Some 9.9% are covered under public insurance programs, such as Medicare and Medicaid. Medicare covers people on Social Security disability. Medicaid covers people with low incomes who receive SSI payments, including people with disabilities..

People with disabilities are much more likely than those without disabilities to be covered by public insurance. Of the 23.2 million people under age 65 with disabilities, 26.8% are covered by public insurance. Only 7.9% of people without disabilities have public coverage (Table 1).

Children and adolescents (under age 18) with disabilities are twice as likely to be covered under public programs as those without disabilities -- 25.9% compared with 13.4%. They are also less likely than children without disabilities to rely on private insurance alone (57.8% versus 70.2%).

Adults aged 18-64 with disabili-

ties are five times as likely to be covered by public insurance plans (26.9%) as adults without disabilities (5.3%). And they are less likely than the non-disabled population to rely on private insurance coverage alone (54.7% versus 77.7%).

Severity of Disability

With greater severity of disability, coverage by public plans increases while private coverage declines (Table 2). Among children and adolescents who are unable to perform their major activity (school or play), 49.5% rely on private health insurance alone and 32.7% are covered by public programs. By contrast, 70.2% of the children not limited in their major activity rely on private insurance alone, while 13.4% are covered by public programs. Over half of children aged 5-17 with ADL (Activities of Daily Living) self-care needs were covered by public programs (mostly Medicaid).

People with disabilities are much more likely than those without disabilities to be covered by public plans

TABLE 1. Health Insurance Coverage, Disability, and Age

Activity Limitation Status

Type of Insurance Coverage	Total		Limited		Not Limited	
	Population (in 1000's)	%	Population (in 1000's)	%	Population (in 1000's)	%
Total, under age 65	214,314	100.0	23,198	100.0	191,116	100.0
No Insurance	35,286	16.5	4,062	17.5 ‡	31,224	16.3
Private Plan Only	156,775	73.2	12,788	55.1 #	143,986	75.3
Public Plan Only	16,475	7.7	4,472	19.3 #	12,003	6.3
Private and Public Plans	4,804	2.2	1,742	7.5 #	3,062	1.6
Other Plan	974	0.5	133	0.6 ‡	841	0.4
Ages 0-17	64,005	100.0	3,438	100.0	60,567	100.0
No Insurance	10,120	15.8	547	15.9	9,574	15.8
Private Plan Only	44,522	69.6	1,986	57.8 #	42,536	70.2
Public Plan Only	7,950	12.4	771	22.4 #	7,179	11.9
Private and Public Plans	1,058	1.7	122	3.5 #	936	1.5
Other Plan	355	0.6	12	0.4	342	0.6
Ages 18-64	150,309	100.0	19,760	100.0	130,549	100.0
No Insurance	25,165	16.7	3,515	17.8 ‡	21,650	16.6
Private Plan Only	112,253	74.7	10,802	54.7 #	101,450	77.7
Public Plan Only	8,525	5.7	3,700	18.7 #	4,824	3.7
Private and Public Plans	3,746	2.5	1,620	8.2 #	2,126	1.6
Other Plan	620	0.4	121	0.6	499	0.4

LaPlante, M. P. (1993). Disability, Health Insurance Coverage, and Utilization of Acute Health Services in the United States. Disability Statistics Report (4). Washington, DC: National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research.

FIGURE 1. Medicare and Medicaid Coverage, by Disability and Gender, Ages 18-64.

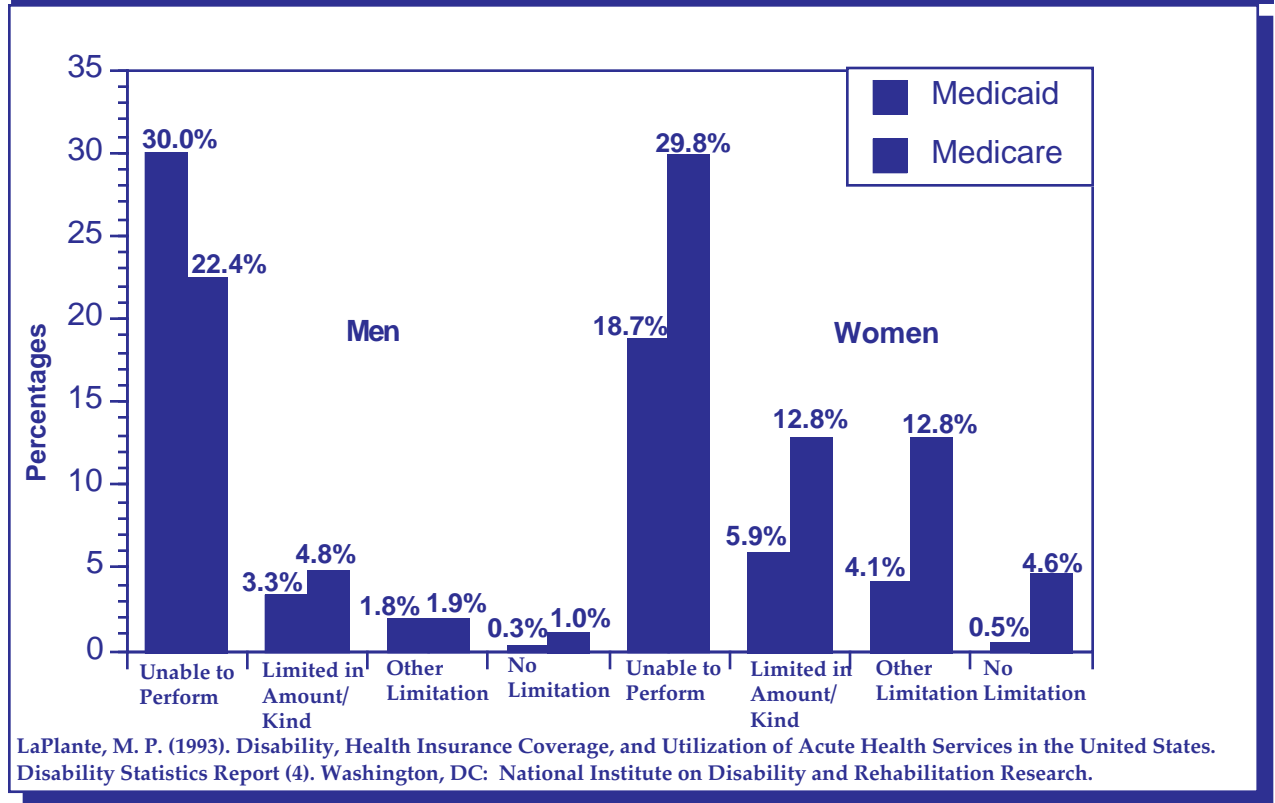


TABLE 2. Health Insurance Coverage, Disability Status, and Age

Age and Disability Status	Total Population (1000's)	Percent with				
		No Insurance Coverage	Private Plan Only	Public Plan Only	Private & Public Plans	Other Plan
Ages 0-17	64,005	15.8	69.6	12.4	1.7	1.6
Major Activity						
Unable to perform major activity	346	17.1	49.5	28.3	4.4 *	0.7 *
Limited in amount/kind of major activity	2,097	17.8	54.3	23.8	4.0	0.2 *
Limited in other activity	994	11.4	68.1	17.5	2.4 *	0.6 *
Not limited in activity	60,567	15.8	70.2	11.9	1.5	0.6
Basic Life Activities						
Needs help in self care (ADL)	194	9.7 *	38.3	43.7	8.3 *	0.0 *
Not limited in basic life activities	63,811	15.8	69.7	12.3	1.6	0.6
Ages 18-64	150,309	16.7	74.7	5.7	2.5	0.4
Major Activity						
Unable to perform major activity	6,772	17.4	34.1	33.9	13.5	1.0
Limited in amount/kind of major activity	7,498	19.4	62.7	10.8	6.5	0.6
Limited in other activity	5,490	16.1	69.1	10.9	3.9	0.1 *
Not limited in activity	130,549	16.6	77.7	3.7	1.6	0.4
Work Activity						
Unable to work	7,980	17.3	34.3	34.3	13.2	0.9
Limited in amount/kind of work	6,776	19.8	66.3	8.0	5.4	0.5
Limited in other activity	5,004	15.8	71.5	8.5	4.0	0.3 *
Not limited in activity	130,549	16.6	77.7	3.7	1.6	0.4
Basic Life Activities						
Needs help in self care (ADL)	780	12.1	21.2	40.8	24.7	1.3 *
Needs help in routine activities (IADL)	2,210	13.5	35.6	36.9	13.8	0.3 *
Not limited in basic life activities	147,320	16.8	75.6	5.0	2.2	0.4

* Estimate has low statistical reliability (relative standard error >30%)
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Almost two thirds of adults who need help in ADLs (65.5%) are covered under public programs. With less severe disabilities, public coverage declines and private coverage increases.

Almost half (47.4%) of adults unable to perform their major activities (work or housework) are covered by public programs. Of adults limited in non- major activ-

ity, only 14.8% have public coverage.

Medicare and Medicaid Coverage

Among people unable to perform their major activity (work or housekeeping), men are more likely than women to be covered by Medicare -- 30.0% versus 18.7% (Figure 1). By contrast, women unable to perform their major

About 393,000 people with ADL or IADL needs are uninsured

activity are more likely than men to be covered by Medicaid -- 29.8% versus 22.4%. The percent of women covered by Medicaid is higher than that for men for all levels of disability.

Uninsurance

Despite the fact that public insurance shoulders a substantial responsibility for people with disabilities, significant numbers of people with very severe disabilities are uninsured.

Almost 10 percent of children needing help in ADLs are uninsured, as are more than 12 percent of similarly disabled adults (Table 2). Furthermore, 13.5% of adults with IADL (Instrumental Activities of Daily Living -- shopping, managing money, etc.) assistance needs are uninsured. Thus, some 393,000 individuals with ADL or IADL assistance needs are uninsured -- a population with high need for health services.

The rate of uninsurance varies by severity of disability, and people with moderate disabilities are generally most likely to be uninsured. For example, almost 20 percent of adults limited in the kind or amount of work they can do are uninsured.

People with disabilities may lack health insurance because they have been denied coverage for pre-existing conditions, face exorbitant premiums, encounter restricted eligibility for public insurance, and other reasons, but many people with disabilities have exceptional health care needs. Health care reform efforts should strive to ensure that the 4.1 million uninsured people with disabilities will have access to needed health services.

Notes

Disability is defined in the NHIS by limitations in usual activities. A child with a disability is one who is unable to attend school, is limited in the amount or kind of school work, or is limited in activities other than school. An adult with a disability is one who cannot work or do housework, is limited in the amount or kind of work or housework, or is limited in other activities. This definition of disability excludes some people with less severe functional limitations that limit human action but do not affect their usual activities. A person is considered to have health insurance if the individual was covered by a private health insurance plan or a public program, including Medicare and Medicaid, or a military plan.

Credits

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This abstract is one of a series presenting statistical information on disability in the U.S. Statistics presented have negligible sampling error, but nonsampling error may arise. Comparisons and relationships discussed may be affected by other unanalyzed factors. This abstract is based on a report by Mitchell P. LaPlante titled *Disability, Health Insurance Coverage, and Utilization of Acute Health Services in the United States*. Disability Statistics Report (4). Washington, DC: National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research. Single copies may be requested without charge from the above address.