



HealthVoices

Medicaid Expansion in Georgia

Issue 1, 2013

Beginning in January 2014, Georgia has the option to expand Medicaid to cover adults with incomes up to 138 percent of the federal poverty level – just below \$16,000 for an individual or \$27,000 for a family of three.¹ The expansion would be overwhelmingly funded with new federal funds – which would pay 100 percent of the costs for the first three years and no less than 90 percent thereafter – and could extend health coverage to more than 500,000 Georgians who otherwise would likely remain uninsured.²

Georgia ranks near the bottom among states when it comes to health coverage. In 2011, Georgia was home to the 5th largest population of uninsured residents as nearly 1.9 million Georgians went without coverage. More than one in four Georgians between ages 19 and 64 went without coverage in 2011, which is also among the worst rates of any state.³ Low-income adults (defined for this brief as having income at or below 138 percent of the poverty line) fare especially poorly in Georgia's current health care system, as more than half of all working-age Georgians (ages 19–64) with income below the new Medicaid expansion threshold went without health coverage in 2011.⁴

Expanding Medicaid as available under the Affordable Care Act would have a dramatic effect on the number of Georgians who go without health coverage. This brief provides more information on the Georgians who could be covered if Georgia expands, including examining the age, racial, ethnic, and geographic makeup of the newly eligible population. Furthermore, the brief examines the employment-status of the newly-eligible population including an overview of some of the sectors of Georgia's workforce that would benefit the most.

Who Benefits from Medicaid Expansion in Georgia?

Expanding Medicaid would dramatically increase health coverage for Georgians in low-wage jobs. Based on state and national forecasts, more than 500,000 newly-eligible Georgians could enroll in an expanded Medicaid program within the first three years.

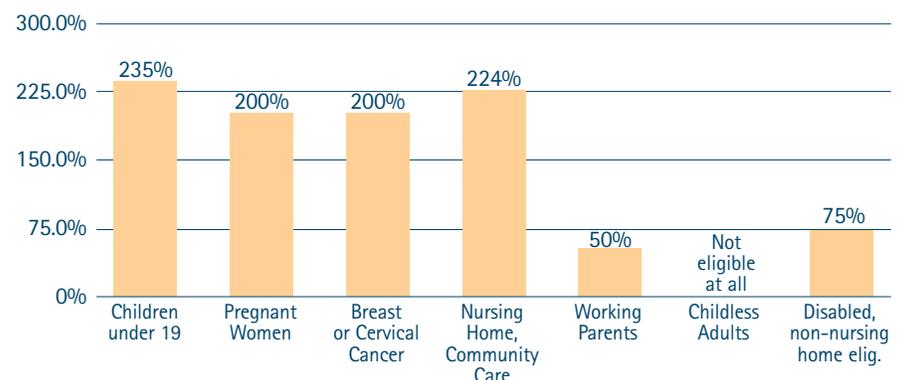
Although Medicaid generally covers children from low-income families, working-age, non-disabled

adults are typically ineligible. In 2011, nearly 1.5 million working-age Georgians (ages 19–64) lived in households with income at or below 138 percent of the poverty level – about \$16,000 for an individual or \$27,000 for a family of three.⁵ More than half of these Georgians went without health coverage due in large part to limited Medicaid eligibility and limited access to job-based health coverage.

As shown in Figure 1 below, adults with dependent children (parents) are eligible only with income below about \$9,000 for a family of three, while adults without dependent children (childless adults) are ineligible for Medicaid regardless of their income level.

Expanding Medicaid as available under the Affordable Care Act would have a dramatic effect on the number of Georgians who go without health coverage.

Figure 1 : Georgia's Medicaid Eligibility as a Percent of Federal Poverty Line



As a result of the more limited eligibility standards for adults than for children, adults from low-income families are more than 3 times more likely to go without coverage than children from these families.



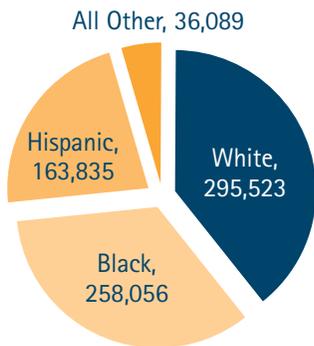
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Demographics of Georgia's Low-Income, Uninsured Adults

Income is a strong predictor of health insurance coverage among adults in Georgia, due in large part to the scarcity of public health insurance coverage for working-age adults.

Overall, more than half of Georgia's low-income, working age adults went without coverage in 2011.

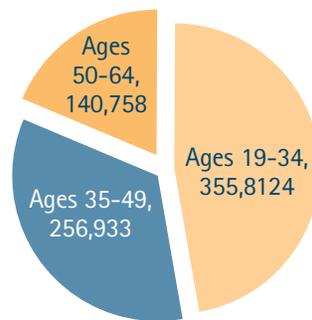
The uninsured rate for these adults is more than two-and-a-half times the rate for adults with incomes between 250-400 percent of the poverty level and more than six times higher than for adults above 400 percent of poverty.



For adults in this income level, access to health coverage is limited across racial and ethnic groups. Black and white Georgians in this income group lack health coverage at similar rates—45.5 percent for black Georgians compared to 46.3 percent for white Georgians. Hispanic Georgians are much less likely to have health coverage than other racial and ethnic groups; however, as 77 percent of Georgia's Hispanic adults in this income range went without coverage in 2011.⁷

Uninsured, Newly-Eligible Adults by Age

Younger Georgians with lower incomes are less likely to have health coverage compared to older Georgians in the same income range. Low-income adults between the ages of 19-49 are one-third more likely to be uninsured (54 percent) compared to adults ages 50-64 (40 percent). As a result, nearly half of the uninsured adults in the expansion population are between the ages of 19-34, with another third between the ages of 35-49.⁸



Women make up a larger share of the low-income group than men (56 percent to 44 percent), however, men are less likely to have health coverage at this income level (55 percent for men compared to 48 percent for women). This coverage gap is likely due to two factors: 1) pregnant women are covered by Medicaid at higher incomes than parents, and 2) women may be more likely than men to qualify for Medicaid as a result of their parental status.⁹

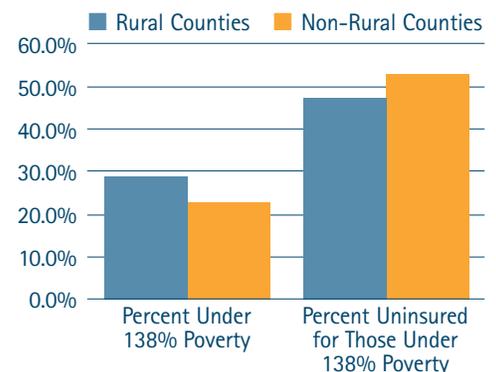
Although uninsured rates for low-income adults are high across demographic groups, Non-white and younger Georgians are overrepresented in the low-income group and are therefore more likely to be uninsured compared to white or older Georgians more broadly.

Coverage Gains Felt Throughout Georgia, Especially Strong in Rural Counties

Expanding Medicaid would benefit both urban and rural parts of Georgia, though it would do so for different

reasons, as shown in Figure 2. For instance, a larger portion of Georgians living in rural counties have incomes that fall below the Medicaid expansion threshold, which means that a larger share of Georgia's rural residents would qualify for the expansion compared to residents of non-rural counties. On the other hand, low-income Georgians in non-rural counties are less likely to have health coverage compared to their rural counterparts, which means that Medicaid expansion is still especially important for non-rural counties.¹⁰

Figure 2: Rural Georgians Face Higher Rates of Poverty; Non-Rural Residents More likely to be Uninsured



Nearly 3 in 10 Georgians between the ages of 18-64 living in rural communities (or more than 295,000 individuals) lack health coverage. Nearly half of these Georgians have income below 138 percent of the poverty line which could enable them to be covered through Medicaid if Georgia expands eligibility. Overall, more than 1 in 8 working-age Georgians living in rural communities are both uninsured and have income that would qualify them for an expanded Medicaid program.¹¹

Although lower poverty rates in non-rural parts of the state mean a slightly smaller share of Georgians in non-rural communities benefit from the Medicaid expansion, more than 44 percent of uninsured Georgians in non-rural parts of the state could gain coverage through an expanded Medicaid program.¹²

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More than Half of Newly-Eligible, Uninsured Georgians Work



More than 420,000 working Georgians with income below 138 percent of the poverty level went without health insurance in 2011, which accounts for 56 percent of the more than 750,000 uninsured adults in this income range.¹³ In general, low-wage workers are less likely to have access to employer-sponsored coverage than higher-wage workers. Even when low-wage workers are offered coverage, they are often unable to afford employer-sponsored coverage due to the costs.

More than 65,000 uninsured workers in the both restaurant and food service industry and the construction industry could get health coverage if Georgia expands Medicaid, as well as thousands of workers in other jobs. More than 13,000 uninsured workers in Georgia's grocery stores could get coverage, as could nearly 9,000 child-care workers throughout the state. Highlights of the top 10 industries in terms of uninsured workers with wages below the new Medicaid expansion threshold are shown in Figure 3.¹⁴

Conclusions

Expanding Medicaid to cover low-income, generally uninsured adults in Georgia will have a profound effect on access to health care for hundreds of thousands of Georgians, most of whom work. These newly covered Georgians would have better access to preventive and health maintenance services covered by Medicaid, services that are often difficult for uninsured individuals to access.

The benefits of the coverage expansion would stretch across Georgia's diverse population of adults. However, the expansion will be particularly helpful for younger adults, who generally have less income than older adults who are further along in their career.

The expansion will also be slightly more beneficial for black Georgians, who are more likely to have incomes below the new eligibility threshold. White Georgians will benefit dramatically because they lack coverage at similar rates when at similar income levels. Similarly, low-income men are less likely to have health coverage than women with similar income, though women make up a larger share of the low-income population in the first place.

If Georgia fails to expand Medicaid, hundreds of thousands of low-income Georgians will remain uninsured and the state's health system will continue to be plagued by the health access problems that stem from Georgia's significant coverage gaps.

Figure 3: Adults in Georgia with Family Income At or Below 138% of Poverty

Total	1,480,780
Uninsured	753,500
Uninsured Workers	422,220
Restaurants and Other Food Services	68,390
Construction	66,800
Grocery Stores	13,290
Landscaping Services	11,660
Private Households Services (gardeners, cooks, caretakers)	10,860
Child Day Care	9,920
Building Services (janitor, extermination, cleaning)	9,290
Employment Services (temp agencies)	8,750
Elementary and Secondary Schools	7,910
Travel Agencies	7,270

Source: Analysis of the 2011 American Community Survey. Adults are those aged 19 through 64. Workers are those who have worked within the past year. The ten industries above are those with the largest number of uninsured workers in the Medicaid expansion income-eligibility range in Georgia. All figures are rounded to the nearest ten workers.

1 The Affordable Care Act expands Medicaid to 133 percent of poverty and includes a 5 percent income. For simplicity, this brief uses 138 percent of the federal poverty line.
 2 Official state forecasts obtained via open records request. National state-by-state forecasts also available: <http://www.kff.org/medicaid/upload/8384.pdf>
 3 GBPI Calculations of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2011 American Community Survey (ACS).
 4 Center on Budget and Policy Priorities calculations of 2011 ACS data on behalf of GBPI.
 5 Ibid.
 6 GBPI Calculations of 2011 ACS data.
 7 CBPP Calculations of 2011 ACS data.
 8 Ibid.
 9 Ibid.
 10 GBPI calculations of data from Census Bureau's 2010 Small Area Health Insurance Estimates data released August 2012. <http://www.census.gov/did/www/sahie/>
 11 Ibid.
 12 Ibid.
 13 CBPP analysis of ACS data, March 2013.
 14 Ibid.



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Through strategic grantmaking, Healthcare Georgia Foundation supports organizations that drive positive change; promotes programs that improve health and health care among underserved individuals and communities; and connects people, partners and resources across Georgia.

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