

Hispanics, Health Insurance and Health Care Access

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Six-in-ten Hispanic adults living in the United States who are not citizens or legal permanent residents lack health insurance, according to a new analysis by the Pew Hispanic Center of a survey it conducted in 2007.¹ The nationwide survey offers a detailed look at the health insurance and health care access of an immigrant subgroup that has become a focus of attention in the current debate over health care reform.

The share of uninsured among this group (60%) is much higher than the share of uninsured among Latino adults who are legal permanent residents or citizens (28%), or among the adult population of the United States (17%).

	Hispanics Who Are Not Citizens and Not Legal Permanent Residents	Hispanics Who Are Citizens or Legal Permanent Residents	U.S. Population
Have No Health Insurance Coverage	60	28	17
Have Usual Health Care Provider (not including emergency room)	57	76	83
Provider is a clinic or health center	41	30	---
Provider is a doctor, HMO or hospital outpatient department	15	44	---
Don't Have Usual Health Care Provider	37	17	15
Consider the Emergency Room Their Usual Health Care Provider	6	7	---

Notes: All analyses include adults only. Percents may not total due to rounding. Responses of "Don't Know" and "Refused" not shown.
Sources: 2007 Pew Hispanic Center/Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Latino Health Survey. U.S. population statistics regarding insurance coverage obtained from March 2009 Current Population Survey. U.S. population statistics regarding usual provider obtained from 2008 National Health Interview Survey.

¹ Except where noted, results are based on the 2007 Pew Hispanic Center/Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Latino Health Survey, in which a nationally representative sample of 4,013 Latinos were surveyed from July 16 to Sept. 23, 2007 (see [Livingston, Minushkin and Cohn, 2008](#)).

Hispanic adults who are neither citizens nor legal permanent residents tend to be younger and healthier than the adult U.S. population and are less likely than other groups to have a regular health care provider. Just 57% say there is a place they usually go when they are sick or need advice about their health, compared with 76% of Latino adults who are citizens or legal permanent residents and 83% of the adult U.S. population.

Overall, four-in-ten (41%) non-citizen, non-legal permanent resident Hispanics state that their usual provider is a community clinic or health center. These centers are designed primarily as “safety nets” for vulnerable populations and are funded by a variety of sources, including the federal government, state governments and private foundations, as well as reimbursements from patients, based upon a sliding scale ([U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008](#)).

Some 15% of Latino adults who are neither citizens nor legal permanent residents report that they use private doctors, hospital outpatient facilities, or health maintenance organizations when they are sick or need advice about their health. Traditionally, patients in these settings are required to pay for their care, either via insurance or out of pocket.

An additional 6% of Latino adults who are neither citizens nor legal permanent residents report that they usually go to an emergency room when they are sick or need advice about their health. Most emergency rooms are required by law to provide care to all patients. Patients are responsible for payment for emergency room services, but in some instances the Federal government partially reimburses hospitals for expenses the patients cannot afford.

Some 37% of Latino adults who are neither citizens nor legal permanent residents have no usual health care provider. More than one-fourth (28%) of the people in this group indicate that financial limitations prevent them from having a usual provider—17% report that their lack of insurance is the primary reason, while 12% cite high medical costs in general. However, a majority—56%—say they do not have a usual provider because they simply do not need one. An additional 5% state that difficulty in negotiating the U.S. health care system prevents them from having a usual provider.

Table 2
Primary Reason Cited by Those with No Usual Health Care Provider
(%)

	Hispanics Who Are Not Citizens and Not Legal Permanent Residents	Hispanics Who Are Citizens or Legal Permanent Residents
No Need	56	53
Seldom/never sick	46	39
Don't use doctors/treat self	10	14
Financial Reasons	28	27
No health insurance/lost health insurance	17	17
Cost of medical care	12	10
Difficulty Negotiating System	5	2
Don't know where to go for care	5	1
Can't find provider who speaks the language	1	1
Other Reasons	8	13

Notes: All analyses include adults only. Percents may not total due to rounding. Responses of "Don't Know" and "Refused" not shown.
Source: 2007 Pew Hispanic Center/Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Latino Health Survey

Undocumented immigrants and their children comprise 17% ([Passel & Cohn, 2009](#)) of the estimated 46 million Americans who lack health insurance ([U.S. Census Bureau, 2009](#)).² According to Pew Hispanic Center estimates, 11.9 million undocumented immigrants were living in the U.S. in 2008. Three-quarters (76%) of these undocumented immigrants were Latinos ([Passel & Cohn, 2009](#)).

Overall, about one-quarter of all adult Latinos are undocumented. Pew Hispanic Center analyses of Current Population Survey data indicate that approximately 98% of Hispanic immigrants who are neither citizens nor legal permanent residents are undocumented. So, while the survey classification used in this report does not line up exactly with the Latino undocumented population, the two groups are nearly identical.

Health Status

The Latino population in the U.S. is relatively young, and Latino adults who are neither citizens nor legal permanent residents are younger still. Some 43% of adult Latinos who are not citizens or legal permanent residents are younger than 30, compared with 27% of Hispanic adults who are citizens or legal permanent residents and 22% of the adult U.S. population. The youthfulness of this population contributes to its relative healthiness. Among adult Latinos who are neither citizens nor legal permanent residents, just over one-third (34%) report that they either missed work, or spent at least half a day in bed over the past year, due to illness or injury. The rate rises to 42% among adult Latinos who are citizens or legal permanent residents and to 52% among the U.S. adult population.

² March 2009 Current Population Survey data show that 15% of American adults and children lack health insurance.

	Hispanics Who Are Not Citizens and Not Legal Permanent Residents	Hispanics Who Are Citizens or Legal Permanent Residents	U.S. Population
Age			
18-29	43	27	22
30-49	48	43	37
50-64	5	18	24
65+	1	10	17
Number of Days in the Past Year that Respondents Spent Half a Day in Bed or Missed Work Due to Illness or Injury			
0 days	64	56	47
1-365 days	34	42	52

Notes: All analyses include adults only. Percents may not total due to rounding. Responses of "Don't Know" and "Refused" not shown.
Sources: 2007 Pew Hispanic Center/Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Latino Health Survey. U.S. population statistics regarding age obtained from 2008 American Community Survey. U.S. population statistics regarding sick days obtained from 2008 National Health Interview Survey.

Experiences in the Health Care System

Three-fourths (76%) of Latino adults who are neither citizens nor legal permanent residents report that the quality of medical care they received in the past year was excellent or good. This is similar to the proportion of adult Latino citizens and legal permanent residents (78%) who express satisfaction with their recent health care.

However, when asked a separate question—whether they had received any poor medical treatment in the past five years—adult Latinos who are neither citizens nor legal permanent residents are less likely (16%) to report any problems than are Latinos who are citizens or legal permanent residents (24%).

Among those Latinos who are neither citizens nor legal permanent residents who report receiving poor medical treatment in the past five years, a plurality (46%) state that they believed their accent or the way they spoke English contributed to that poor care. A similar share (43%) believed that their inability to pay for care contributed to their poor treatment. More than one-third (37%) felt that their race or ethnicity played a part in their poor care, and one-fourth (25%) attributed the unsatisfactory treatment to something in their medical history.

When asked about their most recent medical appointment, three-fourths (76%) of Latino adults who are neither citizens nor legal permanent residents report that they felt comforted or relieved by the visit, and 69% report feeling reassured. Much smaller proportions left their most recent medical visit feeling frustrated (31%) or confused (27%).

Table 4		
Experiences in the Health Care System		
(%)		
	Hispanics Who Are Not Citizens and Not Legal Permanent Residents	Hispanics Who Are Citizens or Legal Permanent Residents
Ratings of Medical Care Received in the Past 12 Months		
Excellent	20	32
Good	56	46
Fair	21	17
Poor	2	5
Share Reporting That They Ever Received Poor Quality Medical Care in the Past 5 Years		
	16	24
Perceived Reasons for Receiving Poor Quality Care:		
Lack of English language skills	46	21
Inability to pay	43	29
Racial or ethnic background	37	28
Medical history	25	20
Feelings Regarding Most Recent Visit to a Doctor or Medical Professional		
Relief or comfort from information received	76	77
Reassurance about managing own health	69	76
Frustration due to inability to obtain desired information	31	26
Confusion regarding information provided	27	23
Note: All analyses include adults only. Percents may not total due to rounding. Responses of "Don't Know" and "Refused" not shown.		
Source: 2007 Pew Hispanic Center/Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Latino Health Survey		