

A close-up photograph of a person's eyes, looking directly at the camera. The person has dark skin and dark hair. The eyes are the central focus, with reflections visible in the pupils. The background is a soft, out-of-focus brown.

Medicaid/CHIP

Alabama



# Expanding Medicaid in Alabama: Unlocking the Door to Health Insurance for African Americans

Alabama has the opportunity to accept federal Medicaid funds and extend much-needed health coverage to more than 300,000 low-income, uninsured adults. Of this population, 36 percent—more than 108,000 people—are African Americans.<sup>1</sup>

Accepting federal Medicaid funds would not only provide more than 108,000 African American Alabamans with access to affordable health insurance, it would also be a critical step toward achieving health equity in the state. Compared to non-Hispanic whites, African Americans nationally have higher rates of several diseases—including diabetes, cervical cancer, and breast cancer—all of which can be ameliorated by access to health insurance.<sup>2</sup>

Working with Dr. Shun Zhang, a biostatistician with the National Center for Primary Care at Morehouse School of Medicine, Families USA examined key measures of health and access to health care from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS 2012). The data set compares access to health care and preventive health services for insured and uninsured low-income African Americans.

Our analysis found that uninsured, low-income, African American Alabamans were more likely to report not seeing a doctor because of cost; more likely to report not having a regular doctor; and more likely to report missing an annual, routine check-up than their insured counterparts.

## Findings from the BRFSS Data

The BRFSS database does not use federal poverty levels; therefore, we defined low-income individuals as any person with an annual income of \$35,000 or less. This BRFSS income break approximates 138 percent of the federal poverty level for a family with between four and five people.

Our analysis provides a valuable picture of the health status of a low-income population that correlates to the Medicaid expansion population. Below are three core indicators of this population’s access to health care.

### Three Core Health Indicators

**\$ Could not see a doctor because of cost**  
**Fifty-six percent** of *uninsured*, low-income African Americans reported that they could not see a doctor because of cost, whereas only 21 percent of *insured*, low-income African Americans reported the same outcome.

**👤 No regular source of care**  
**Fifty-five percent** of *uninsured*, low-income African Americans reported that they did not have a regular doctor, whereas only 17 percent of *insured*, low-income African Americans reported the same outcome.

**🔍 No access to a routine check-up**  
**Forty-two percent** of *uninsured*, low-income African Americans reported that they had not had a routine check-up in the past year, whereas only 22 percent of *insured*, low-income African Americans reported the same outcome.

## ALABAMA

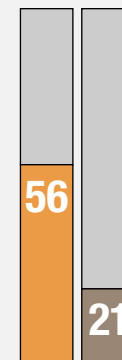
### 3 CORE HEALTH INDICATORS FOR LOW-INCOME AFRICAN AMERICANS WITH/WITHOUT INSURANCE

#### CAN'T AFFORD TO SEE A DOCTOR

Percent of low-income African Americans who reported they could not see a doctor due to cost:

■ **Uninsured: 56%**

■ **Insured: 21%**

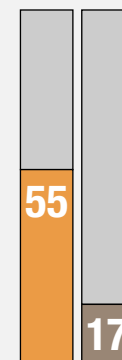


#### DO NOT HAVE A REGULAR DOCTOR

Percent of low-income African Americans who reported they did not have a regular doctor:

■ **Uninsured: 55%**

■ **Insured: 17%**

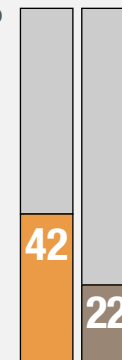


#### NO ROUTINE CHECK-UP

Percent of low-income African Americans who reported they had not had a routine check-up in the past year:

■ **Uninsured: 42%**

■ **Insured: 22%**



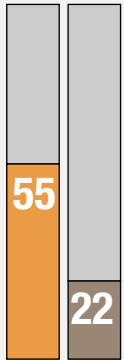
Families USA 2014

## OTHER HEALTH INDICATORS FOR LOW-INCOME AFRICAN AMERICANS WITH/WITHOUT INSURANCE

### NO MAMMOGRAM

Percent of low-income African American women over 40 years old who reported that they had not had a mammogram to screen for breast cancer in the past two years:

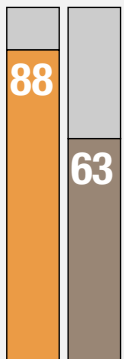
- Uninsured: 55%
- Insured: 22%



### NO PROSTATE CANCER SCREENING

Percent of low-income African American men over 40 years old who reported that they had not had a prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test to screen for prostate cancer in the past two years:

- Uninsured: 88%
- Insured: 63%



Families USA 2014

## Other Notable Health Care Indicators

Below are indicators of access to important preventive services.

- » **No access to a screening mammogram**  
**Fifty-five percent** of *uninsured*, low-income, African American women who are more than 40 years old reported that they had not had a mammogram in the past two years, whereas only 22 percent of *insured*, low-income, African American women who are more than 40 years old reported the same outcome.
- » **No access to a prostate cancer screening**  
**Eighty-eight percent** of *uninsured*, low-income, African American men who are more than 40 years old reported that they had not had a prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test to screen for prostate cancer in the past two years, whereas only 63 percent of *insured*, low-income, African American men who are more than 40 years old reported the same outcome.

## Alabama's Medicaid Expansion Option

The Affordable Care Act gives Alabama and other states the option to provide Medicaid to residents with incomes up to 138 percent of the federal poverty level (\$32,913 for a family of four in 2014). Twenty-seven states and the District of Columbia have decided to accept the federal dollars and expand Medicaid to their low-income, uninsured residents. Alabama has not.

To be eligible for Medicaid in Alabama, a family's income must be no more than 18 percent of poverty (\$4,293 annually for a family of four). Alabama does not provide any Medicaid coverage to adults without dependent children.<sup>3</sup>

## Alabama: The Cost of Expanding Medicaid

If Alabama expands Medicaid, the federal government will pay 100 percent of the cost through 2016, 95 percent in 2017, 94 percent in 2018, 93 percent in 2019, and 90 percent of costs in 2020. Alabama will not have to pay more than 10 percent of the cost of providing hundreds of thousands of Alabamans with affordable, quality health insurance.

## New Jobs

If Alabama expands Medicaid, the influx of new federal dollars will generate new jobs in the health care sector and other economic sectors. If Alabama had expanded Medicaid in January 2014 when the option was first available, the influx of federal dollars would have supported approximately 12,000 jobs in 2016.<sup>4</sup>



## Expanding Access to Insurance Is Key to Achieving Health Equity

Extensive published research, including recent studies, as well as the 2001 landmark study by the Institute of Medicine,<sup>5</sup> have established the correlation between expanding access to health insurance and improving health status. Insurance provides access to doctors, hospitals, other providers, and treatment. Most importantly, people with insurance tend to have a regular doctor available for routine check-ups and to treat health problems as they arise, before they escalate into serious and costly conditions. For many people, early detection and treatment are matters of life and death.

And while we know that an insurance card alone does not end racial or ethnic disparities in health status and treatment, it is clear that expanding the availability of affordable, quality health insurance for African American communities is a necessary first condition for achieving health care equity.

## Conclusion

There is no question that African American communities have a significant stake in the Medicaid expansion debate in Alabama. The Medicaid expansion can unlock a door to the health care system for hundreds of thousands in African American communities across the state. For Alabama, rejecting Medicaid expansion means leaving billions of federal Medicaid dollars on the table. Alabamans who care about public health, economic growth, social justice, and health equity should tell their state leaders to move Alabama forward by expanding Medicaid.

**For a detailed methodology and other state reports in this series, please visit:**  
[www.FamiliesUSA.org/MedicaidAfAm](http://www.FamiliesUSA.org/MedicaidAfAm)

## Working but Uninsured

Across the 23 states that have not expanded Medicaid, more than 80 percent of those who stand to gain coverage are either working or not in the workforce. Most—57 percent—are currently working or have worked within the last year. Twenty-four percent are classified as “not in the workforce” and include people with disabilities, students, non-working spouses, and people who have left the workforce.<sup>6</sup>

More information on how this population would benefit from Medicaid expansion:  
[www.FamiliesUSA.org/MedicaidExpansion2014](http://www.FamiliesUSA.org/MedicaidExpansion2014)

## ENDNOTES

1 Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured, *The Impact of the Coverage Gap in States Not Expanding Medicaid by Race and Ethnicity* (Washington: Kaiser Family Foundation, December 2013), available online at <http://kaiserfamilyfoundation.files.wordpress.com/2013/12/8527-the-impact-of-the-coverage-gap-in-states-not-expanding-medicaid.pdf>.

2 Families USA, *Latino Health Disparities Compared to Non-Hispanic Whites* (Washington: Families USA, July 2014), available online at <http://familiesusa.org/product/latino-health-disparities-compared-non-hispanic-whites>.

3 Kaiser Family Foundation, State Health Facts, *Medicaid Income Eligibility Limits for Medicaid at Application, as of April 1, 2014*, available online at <http://kff.org/medicaid/state-indicator/medicaid-income-eligibility-limits-for-adults-at-application-as-of-april-1-2014/>.

4 Families USA, *Medicaid Expansion Boosts State Economies* (Washington: Families USA, 2013), available online at <http://familiesusa.org/product/medicaid-expansion-boosts-state-economies>.

5 Institute of Medicine, *Coverage Matters: Insurance and Health Care* (Washington: The National Academies Press, 2001). See also Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, *Disparities in Healthcare Quality among Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups: Selected Findings from the 2010 National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Report* (Rockville, MD: Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, March 2011), available online at <http://www.ahrq.gov/research/findings/nhqrdr/nhqrdr10/minority.html>.

6 Families USA, *Medicaid Expansion across the States* (Washington: Families USA, 2014), available online at <http://familiesusa.org/product/expanding-health-coverage-working-individuals-and-families>.

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