WHERE WE STAND

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WHERE WE STAND UPDATE: HEALTH CARE

As Congress debates health care reform, it is useful to consider regional differences concerning who has health insurance coverage. Regional differences in coverage rates reflect a variety of factors, including public policy in different regions, as well as the composition of local economies.

The purpose of this issue briefing is to examine how St. Louis area residents compare to residents of other regions. This report, as with all previous Where We Stand *documents, compares the St. Louis Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA) with 34 "peer" MSAs.[1] The report is based on data collected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention through its annual survey.[2]*

We focus on major differences among demographic categories—age, income and race. The data presented suggest that key differences among metropolitan regions are associated with differences in how well coverage is extended to less advantaged populations.

Health Care Coverage

The St. Louis MSA ranks seventh in terms of health care coverage, with 87.5 percent coverage. The region with the best overall health care coverage is Boston (94.1 percent), followed closely by Minneapolis (91.2 percent) and Milwaukee (90.6 percent). This tracks closely with coverage rates at the state level: coverage rates are high in Massachusetts (95.1 percent), in Minnesota (92.3 percent) and in Wisconsin (90.0 percent).

According to the CDC survey, 85.2 percent of adults (ages 18-64) nationally have some form of health coverage. There is a notable geographic pattern in who has health coverage. Eight of the ten regions with the best health care coverage are eastern or Midwest cities—the heart of the old industrial national economy. By contrast, eight of the ten regions with the worst health care coverage are southern or western—the booming Sunbelt cities that have experienced the highest levels of job growth in the past decade.

ADULTS WITH HEALTH CARE COVERAGE
Percent ages 18 - 64

1	**Boston**	**94.1**
2	Minneapolis	91.2
3	Milwaukee	90.6
4	San Francisco	90.3
5	Pittsburgh	88.8
6	Philadelphia	87.8
7	**St. Louis**	**87.5**
8	Cleveland	87.3
9	Washington DC	87.2
10	Cincinnati	87.2
11	Baltimore	86.7
12	Kansas City	86.2
13	Louisville	86.0
14	Detroit	86.0
15	Columbus	86.0
16	Seattle	85.8
17	Atlanta	85.1
18	Indianapolis	84.8
19	Portland	84.5
20	Nashville	84.1
Average		**84.0**
21	Denver	84.0
22	New York	83.5
23	Salt Lake City	83.0
24	Chicago	82.3
25	San Diego	81.8
26	Charlotte	81.3
27	Memphis	80.8
28	Austin	80.0
29	Phoenix	78.3
30	Los Angeles	78.0
31	Miami	77.3
32	San Antonio	77.1
33	Oklahoma City	76.0
34	Dallas	75.9
35	**Houston**	**72.4**

HIGHER — AVERAGE — LOWER

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007-2008

1 MSAs are established by the Federal Office of Management and Budget to describe hubs of population and economic activity in an area, as well as the neighboring communities that are economically and socially connected to that core.

2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey Data. Atlanta, Georgia: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2008.

For access to the data, go to http://www.cdc.gov/brfss/questionnaires/index.htm

The BRFS Survey is conducted every year, although the questions sometimes change from year to year. Where possible, East-West Gateway staff combined 2007 and 2008 responses so as to improve the statistical accuracy, particularly with data that breaks down responses according to various demographic variables.

Finally, for tables presenting data that breaks down responses according to various demographic variables, staff worked to ensure that there were sufficient respondents to ensure some degree of statistical confidence in the reported numbers. As a result, this report includes some tables that show data for fewer than all 35 peer regions.

One interpretation for the geographic disparities in coverage is the difference in public policy. Massachusetts passed health care reform in 2006. Accordingly Massachusetts residents (including those in the Boston metropolitan region) have much higher levels of coverage than much of the nation.[3]

Another interpretation relates to job growth. Sixty-four percent of new jobs created over the past 15 years were created by small businesses.[4] Southern and western metropolitan areas have seen increases in employment, arguably due to small businesses.[5] Further, small businesses are far less likely to provide health insurance for their workers than larger businesses.[6] It can be argued that the very success of southern and western cities in attracting small businesses drives the lower rates of health care coverage.

Yet another interpretation has to do with the types of jobs being added in these high-growth areas. Many of the jobs created in these regions have been in low-wage, part-time service sector positions, particularly retail. These jobs often do not provide health care insurance.[7]

In sum, health coverage seems to be lower in the booming sun-belt cities that have experienced the highest levels of economic activity. Different levels of coverage might also be explained by different public policies, or by differences in the underlying structure of the regional economies.

ADULTS WITH HEALTH CARE COVERAGE

Percent ages 18 - 34

1	**Boston**	**91.4**
2	Milwaukee	88.3
3	San Francisco	85.7
4	Minneapolis	85.2
5	Pittsburgh	82.7
6	Philadelphia	82.3
7	**St. Louis**	**81.6**
8	Cincinnati	81.3
9	Washington DC	80.4
10	Kansas City	79.6
11	Atlanta	79.6
12	Cleveland	79.5
13	Baltimore	79.2
14	Nashville	79.0
15	Detroit	78.1
16	Columbus	77.9
Average		**77.1**
17	Indianapolis	76.9
18	Louisville	76.9
19	San Diego	76.8
20	Salt Lake City	76.6
21	Seattle	76.4
22	Denver	76.0
23	Memphis	75.9
24	New York	75.8
25	Charlotte	75.1
26	Portland	74.2
27	Chicago	74.2
28	Austin	74.2
29	Los Angeles	72.4
30	Phoenix	71.5
31	San Antonio	69.4
32	Oklahoma City	67.7
33	Dallas	67.6
34	Miami	66.6
35	**Houston**	**61.7**

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007-2008

ADULTS WITH HEALTH CARE COVERAGE

Percent ages 35 - 44

1	**Boston**	**95.7**
2	Minneapolis	93.7
3	Pittsburgh	92.3
4	Cleveland	92.2
5	Cincinnati	91.8
6	Philadelphia	91.4
7	Milwaukee	91.1
8	Louisville	90.7
9	Columbus	90.7
10	**St. Louis**	**90.4**
11	Washington DC	90.2
12	San Francisco	90.2
13	Seattle	90.1
14	Baltimore	90.0
15	Indianapolis	89.5
16	Kansas City	88.6
17	Portland	88.0
18	Detroit	87.2
19	Atlanta	87.0
20	New York	86.2
Average		**86.1**
21	Chicago	86.0
22	Denver	85.7
23	Nashville	84.7
24	Miami	83.9
25	Salt Lake City	83.7
26	Charlotte	82.9
27	Memphis	81.2
28	Austin	80.9
29	San Diego	79.9
30	Dallas	78.6
31	Los Angeles	77.7
32	Oklahoma City	77.0
33	Phoenix	77.0
34	San Antonio	76.3
35	**Houston**	**72.7**

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007-2008

ADULTS WITH HEALTH CARE COVERAGE

Percent ages 45 - 54

1	**Boston**	**95.2**
2	Minneapolis	94.8
3	San Francisco	93.7
4	Milwaukee	91.8
5	Columbus	91.8
6	Portland	91.2
7	Louisville	91.2
8	Baltimore	91.1
9	Washington DC	90.9
10	Detroit	90.8
11	Cleveland	90.4
12	Seattle	90.4
13	**St. Louis**	**90.4**
14	Pittsburgh	90.3
15	Philadelphia	90.1
16	Kansas City	89.9
17	Cincinnati	89.9
18	Denver	89.7
19	Atlanta	88.9
20	New York	88.8
21	San Diego	88.6
22	Salt Lake City	88.5
Average		**88.5**
23	Nashville	87.6
24	San Antonio	86.5
25	Memphis	85.9
26	Phoenix	85.7
27	Chicago	85.6
28	Indianapolis	85.5
29	Charlotte	85.4
30	Austin	84.0
31	Los Angeles	83.4
32	Houston	82.9
33	Oklahoma City	82.4
34	Miami	81.8
35	**Dallas**	**81.7**

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007-2008

ADULTS WITH HEALTH CARE COVERAGE

Percent ages 55 - 64

1	**Boston**	**96.0**
2	Minneapolis	95.2
3	San Francisco	94.1
4	Salt Lake City	94.0
5	Indianapolis	93.9
6	Milwaukee	92.9
7	Pittsburgh	92.4
8	Seattle	92.2
9	Detroit	92.2
10	Washington DC	92.0
11	Portland	91.9
12	Kansas City	91.5
13	**St. Louis**	**91.3**
14	Denver	91.2
15	Baltimore	91.2
16	Austin	90.7
17	Cleveland	90.6
18	Philadelphia	90.5
19	Chicago	90.4
20	Louisville	90.4
21	Columbus	90.3
Average		**89.9**
22	Nashville	89.8
23	Atlanta	89.8
24	Cincinnati	89.2
25	San Diego	88.8
26	New York	88.4
27	Phoenix	88.2
28	Charlotte	87.6
29	Oklahoma City	85.6
30	Dallas	85.4
31	San Antonio	85.2
32	Los Angeles	85.1
33	Memphis	84.1
34	Houston	83.9
35	**Miami**	**81.0**

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007-2008

HIGHER

AVERAGE

LOWER

3 Understanding Key Parts of the MA Health Plan, http://www.heritage.org/Research/HealthCAre/wm1045.cfm

4 Small Business Association: http://www.sba.gov/advo/stats/sbfaq.pdf

5 "Sunbelt dominates rankings of the hottest US cities for small business," http://www.allbusiness.com/business-finance/business-loans-business-credit/690310-1.html

6 Bureau of Labor Statistics report: Employee Benefits in Private Industry, August 2006 http://www.bls.gov/ncs/ebs/sp/ebsm0004.pdf

7 IBID

Variations among age groups:

St. Louis area residents in all age brackets are more likely than average to have some health coverage. Of interest, there is a tendency for older adults (ages 45-64) in all metro regions to be more likely to have health coverage. Moreover, younger individuals exhibit a larger discrepancy in health coverage across metro regions.[8]

There is significantly more regional disparity for younger people. For instance, less than 10 percent of 18-34 year olds in Boston go without health care coverage, while in Miami over 38 percent do not have coverage. By contrast, over 80 percent of 45-64 year olds in these metropolitan regions have some health care coverage, regardless of where they live.

There is some discussion in the national press that younger people are relatively healthier, and their lower coverage rates reflects that many younger people choose not to have coverage. An alternative interpretation is that older people tend to have better jobs, and these jobs tend to have benefits like health care coverage.

St. Louis residents rank well in every age bracket, and particularly well among the younger age cohorts: over 80 percent of 18-34 year old St. Louis residents have health coverage, as do more than 90 percent of individuals older than 35.

Low levels of health care coverage for younger individuals were particularly noticeable in southern and western cities. Eight of the 10 cities with the lowest health care coverage for 18-34 year olds are "sunbelt cities."

ADULTS WITH HEALTH CARE COVERAGE
Percent household income less than $25,000 a year

1	**Boston**	**84.1**
2	San Francisco	78.1
3	Pittsburgh	76.0
4	Milwaukee	76.0
5	Minneapolis	70.7
6	Philadelphia	69.9
7	Louisville	68.6
8	Columbus	67.7
9	Nashville	66.4
10	Cincinnati	65.8
11	Detroit	65.6
12	Cleveland	63.7
13	Indianapolis	61.7
14	New York	61.7
15	Salt Lake City	61.2
16	**St. Louis**	**60.9**
17	Los Angeles	59.7
Average		**59.7**
18	Kansas City	59.5
19	Seattle	59.3
20	San Diego	59.1
21	Portland	55.3
22	Chicago	55.3
23	Atlanta	55.1
24	Baltimore	55.0
25	Washington DC	52.4
26	San Antonio	52.3
27	Memphis	52.1
28	Denver	52.0
29	Charlotte	50.7
30	Miami	50.4
31	Austin	47.7
32	Oklahoma City	46.9
33	Phoenix	44.7
34	Dallas	43.5
35	**Houston**	**39.7**

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007-2008

ADULTS WITH HEALTH CARE COVERAGE
Percent household income $25,000 - $49,999 a year

1	**Boston**	**89.4**
2	Milwaukee	88.9
3	Philadelphia	86.6
4	Cleveland	86.2
5	**St. Louis**	**84.6**
6	Pittsburgh	84.3
7	Minneapolis	84.1
8	Nashville	83.1
9	San Francisco	83.1
10	Louisville	83.1
11	Columbus	81.9
12	Portland	81.6
13	Kansas City	81.6
14	Cincinnati	81.0
15	Baltimore	79.7
16	Detroit	79.6
17	Memphis	79.2
Average		**79.0**
18	New York	78.6
19	Phoenix	78.3
20	Indianapolis	78.2
21	Seattle	78.1
22	Oklahoma City	78.0
23	Chicago	77.9
24	Charlotte	77.9
25	Atlanta	77.0
26	San Antonio	76.4
27	San Diego	75.8
28	Denver	75.8
29	Los Angeles	74.6
30	Salt Lake City	74.4
31	Washington DC	73.1
32	Austin	72.6
33	Dallas	68.1
34	Miami	68.0
35	**Houston**	**63.9**

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007-2008

ADULTS WITH HEALTH CARE COVERAGE
Percent household income $50,000 - $74,999 a year

1	**Minneapolis**	**97.1**
2	Boston	96.9
3	Cleveland	96.7
4	Milwaukee	96.5
5	Pittsburgh	96.3
6	Kansas City	94.2
7	**St. Louis**	**94.0**
8	San Diego	93.8
9	Memphis	93.3
10	Baltimore	93.2
11	Cincinnati	93.2
12	Oklahoma City	92.8
13	Seattle	92.8
14	Washington DC	92.7
15	San Francisco	92.7
16	Charlotte	92.6
17	Los Angeles	92.5
18	Columbus	92.4
19	Indianapolis	92.3
20	Portland	92.3
21	Detroit	92.3
Average		**92.2**
22	Denver	92.1
23	Louisville	92.0
24	Salt Lake City	91.7
25	Miami	91.2
26	San Antonio	91.0
27	Chicago	91.0
28	New York	90.4
29	Atlanta	90.3
30	Austin	90.1
31	Philadelphia	89.9
32	Nashville	87.6
33	Phoenix	87.6
34	Dallas	87.1
35	**Houston**	**86.0**

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007-2008

ADULTS WITH HEALTH CARE COVERAGE
Percent household income $75,000 or more a year

1	**Boston**	**98.6**
2	San Francisco	98.6
3	Columbus	98.0
4	Baltimore	98.0
5	Washington DC	97.9
6	Kansas City	97.7
7	Portland	97.6
8	Philadelphia	97.5
9	San Diego	97.5
10	**St. Louis**	**97.4**
11	Minneapolis	97.4
12	Cleveland	97.4
13	Austin	97.2
14	Oklahoma City	97.0
15	Nashville	97.0
16	Memphis	96.9
17	Atlanta	96.7
18	Seattle	96.6
19	Charlotte	96.6
Average		**96.6**
20	Denver	96.5
21	Milwaukee	96.5
22	Pittsburgh	96.4
23	Detroit	96.3
24	Indianapolis	96.2
25	Cincinnati	96.0
26	Salt Lake City	95.9
27	Los Angeles	95.8
28	Phoenix	95.6
29	Louisville	95.5
30	New York	95.4
31	Houston	95.2
32	San Antonio	95.2
33	Dallas	94.8
34	Chicago	94.7
35	**Miami**	**93.2**

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007-2008

HIGHER
AVERAGE
LOWER

8 Note that this study excludes health care coverage among the oldest age categories: everyone in America older than 65 has health care coverage as a result of Medicare.

Variations by income:

As might be expected, people from higher-income households are much more likely to have some health care coverage than are people from lower income households. This holds for every metropolitan region in our analysis, and for every income category.

In St. Louis, health care coverage increases at every income category. Roughly three in five (60.9 percent) St. Louis residents with household income less than $25,000 have coverage. This rises to 84.9 percent for those in the $25,000 to $50,000 range, 94 percent for those in the $50,000 to $75,000 range, and 97.4 percent for those with household income higher than $75,000.

Perhaps as interesting, the variation among metropolitan regions is much higher for lower income households. For those in the lowest income category, health care coverage ranges from less than 40 percent in Houston to more than 85 percent in Boston. By contrast, for people in the highest-income households, health care coverage rates topped 93 percent in every region in our study.

Put another way, lack of health care coverage is a problem that primarily affects lower-income households. Moreover, there is significant difference in how lack of coverage affects lower-income people in different parts of the country.

Variations by race:

There is a significant difference in health care coverage between whites and minority populations.[9] In every metropolitan area examined, whites have higher levels of health care coverage than do minorities.

Of interest, St. Louis ranks sixth best (80.7 percent) in terms of coverage for non-white or Hispanic residents. Moreover, the disparity between whites and minority populations in St. Louis is smaller than in most other regions. Eighty-nine percent of white adults have health care coverage in St. Louis and 80.7 percent of minorities do, a difference of 8.3 percentage points. Only three cities have less disparity in coverage between white and non-white residents: Boston (8.2 percentage points), San Francisco (8.0 percentage points), and Cincinnati (3.5 percentage points).

ADULTS WITH HEALTH CARE COVERAGE

Percent non-Hispanic white

1	**Boston**	**95.5**
2	Washington DC	94.7
3	San Francisco	94.4
4	Milwaukee	92.9
5	Minneapolis	92.8
6	Philadelphia	92.2
7	New York	92.1
8	Baltimore	91.3
9	San Diego	91.2
10	Chicago	91.2
11	Los Angeles	90.8
12	Denver	90.7
13	Cleveland	90.3
14	Seattle	90.2
15	Pittsburgh	90.1
16	Kansas City	89.7
Average		**89.4**
17	Atlanta	89.3
18	**St. Louis**	**89.0**
19	Charlotte	88.9
20	Louisville	88.8
21	Phoenix	88.7
22	Portland	88.0
23	Salt Lake City	88.0
24	Detroit	87.8
25	Cincinnati	87.5
26	Dallas	87.4
27	Miami	87.3
28	Columbus	87.2
29	San Antonio	87.2
30	Houston	87.2
31	Memphis	86.6
32	Indianapolis	86.6
33	Austin	86.3
34	Nashville	85.7
35	**Oklahoma City**	**82.8**

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007-2008

ADULTS WITH HEALTH CARE COVERAGE

Percent non-white or Hispanic

1	**Boston**	**89.1**
2	San Francisco	86.8
3	Cincinnati	84.0
4	Detroit	81.6
5	Milwaukee	81.3
6	**St. Louis**	**80.7**
7	Pittsburgh	80.7
8	Atlanta	80.2
9	Minneapolis	79.5
10	Columbus	79.4
11	Washington DC	79.2
12	Nashville	79.1
13	Baltimore	79.0
14	Philadelphia	79.0
15	Indianapolis	78.4
16	Memphis	75.0
17	New York	74.5
18	Seattle	74.4
19	Cleveland	73.7
Average		**73.4**
20	Los Angeles	72.3
21	San Diego	72.3
22	Miami	72.1
23	Kansas City	71.3
24	Louisville	70.8
25	Chicago	70.7
26	Austin	68.1
27	Charlotte	67.9
28	San Antonio	67.7
29	Portland	64.9
30	Denver	63.7
31	Dallas	61.4
32	Salt Lake City	61.2
33	Oklahoma City	61.0
34	Phoenix	58.5
35	**Houston**	**56.5**

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007-2008

HIGHER

AVERAGE

LOWER

Conclusions:

St. Louis rates well in terms of overall health care coverage—seventh overall out of the 35 metropolitan regions studied, with 87.5 percent of the region's residents enjoying some form of coverage.

Statistically, our good overall ranking is driven by the relatively good rankings we enjoy for populations that traditionally have lower levels of coverage. For instance, we rank 7th overall for people ages 18-34, and 5th overall for non-white or Hispanic residents.

It is not altogether clear what drives the differences among various regions. Public policy appears to matter—the presence of Boston at the top of virtually every chart in this report is likely a function of the insurance mandate in place in Massachusetts. In addition, it is also likely that the composition of local economies, as well as past labor practices, drives many of the differences in coverage among regions.

9 The data used for this analysis compares "non-Hispanic White" populations to "non-white or Hispanic" populations. This is the breakdown provided by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. There are likely to be interesting findings if the data were to be broken down further, for instance, between Hispanics and African Americans. Limitations in the data prevent us from providing such analysis.