

# The Salt Lake Tribune

---

## Nearly a third of poor Utahns are uninsured, new report shows

BY JENNIFER DOBNER

THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

PUBLISHED: AUGUST 29, 2013 03:53PM

UPDATED: AUGUST 29, 2013 04:20PM

Poor Utahns were uninsured at rates of 30 percent or higher in 20 counties in 2011, according to data released Thursday from the U.S. Census Bureau.

The highest uninsured rate for the poor was in Summit County, where 45 percent of the residents earning up to 138 percent of the federal poverty level — \$22,350 for a family of four — did not have coverage.

Wasatch County was second, with 40 percent of residents at that income level uninsured. Carbon County had the lowest rate among Utah's 29 counties, with 25 percent of its poor residents uninsured.

The report found 31 percent of poor Utahns statewide were uninsured, with most of them living along the Wasatch Front in Davis, Salt Lake, Utah and Weber counties. The rate of all uninsured Utahns statewide was about 17 percent.

The 2011 county-by-county data comes from the Small Area Health Insurance Estimates (SAHIE) report, which is compiled annually from multiple sources, including 2010 population estimates, aggregated tax returns and public assistance programs, including Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) and SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or food stamps.

It comes just ahead of the expected September release of 2012 data on the uninsured from Utah's Department of Health and the Census Bureau, based on three separate surveys.

The 2011 county data places the total number of uninsured in Utah at 417,274. That's higher than the 377,700 Utahns, or 13.4 of the state population, cited by Utah health officials for the same year. The discrepancy is based on the use of different data sources, health department spokeswoman Kolbi Young said.

The county level numbers provide a road map for Utah advocacy groups that will help Utahns connect with insurance options available under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). The law requires most Americans to have insurance by January 1, and an online marketplace will launch Oct. 1 to help consumers compare and buy plans.

"[This] gives us more information," said Jason Stevenson, spokesman for the Utah Health Policy Project. "We have guesses about where those folks are and now we can go find them."

UHPP, the Association of Utah Community Health Centers and the United Way's 2-1-1 help line are forming a network of agencies and individuals to serve as "navigators" to help the public statewide. The group got about half of Utah's \$800,000 in federal grants to support navigator efforts.

But with most agencies based on the population-dense Wasatch Front, the challenge will be reaching those in more rural communities. In Washington County, 32 percent of the population, or more than 31,000 people, were uninsured, according to SAHIE data. Cache County had more than 27,700 uninsured and Iron County more than 14,000, the report shows.

"The navigator hub is the solution," said Stevenson.

The 2-1-1 line can be dialed from anywhere in the state, and the health centers have 11 locations from Logan to St. George, Stevenson said. And those are just two of the 50 agencies in the network, he noted. Informational tool kits will be provided to libraries and other agencies in rural areas.

UHPP also plans to send "traveling navigators" to communities across the state to hold enrollment events, providing information and in-person assistance, he said.

[jdobner@sltrib.com](mailto:jdobner@sltrib.com)