

## Health Insurance Coverage of the Foreign Born in the United States: Numbers and Trends

Health care costs have increased rapidly in the United States, placing a greater burden on Americans and their families. Health insurance premiums are expected to rise by up to 10 percent in 2004, according to the *New York Times*. This is below the annual increases of 14 to 18 percent in the last few years but more than double the overall inflation rate. When faced with the combination of rising premiums and the increasing cost of deductibles and prescription drug co-payments, many Americans who fail to qualify for government insurance plans, such as Medicaid, are deciding health insurance is too expensive and risk going without.

Immigrants living in the United States are much less likely to be insured than natives. There are several reasons for this. Over one-fourth of immigrants age 16 and over who are in the labor force are part-time or seasonal workers or are unemployed, according to the 2002 Current Population Survey. Part-time and temporary workers usually are not provided with employment-based insurance. Undocumented immigrants, who are estimated to be about 26 percent of all foreign-born, are barred from government insurance programs. Because of their status, the undocumented are not likely to have employment-based insurance or the resources to purchase private insurance. Legal, permanent immigrants are allowed to work, but must be resident for five years before becoming eligible for government insurance programs, with some exceptions. Many temporary immigrants, such as students, do not qualify for government insurance programs and may be limited to temporary employment, if they are allowed to work at all.

The Migration Policy Institute has compiled the following information on health insurance coverage of the foreign born from the 2001 to 2003 Current Population Surveys (Annual Social and Economic Supplements, formerly called the March Supplements).

**Of the 33.5 million foreign-born persons in the United States, 1 in 3 have no health insurance coverage.**

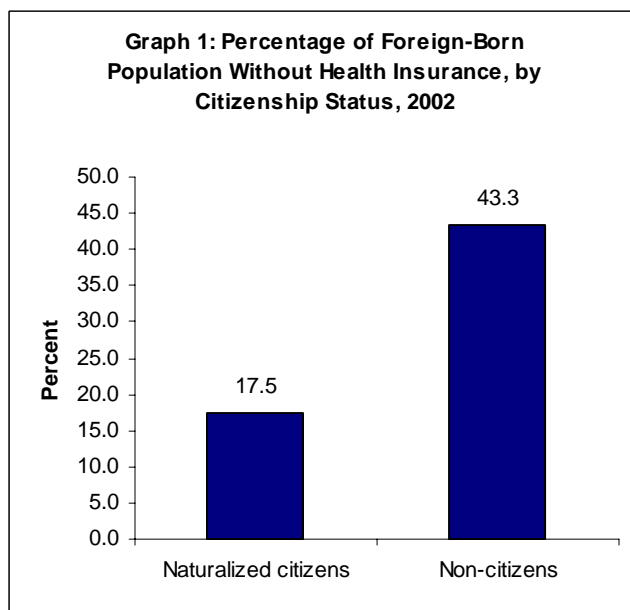
In 2002, of the 33.5 million immigrants in the United States, 11.2 million or 33 percent were without health insurance. (*See Table 1*)

**Immigrants are more than twice as likely to be uninsured than natives.**

Of the 252.5 million natives in the United States, 32.4 million or 13 percent were without health insurance coverage in 2002. By comparison, 33 percent of the foreign born were without insurance. (*See Table 1*)

**Among the foreign born, non-citizens are more likely than naturalized citizens to be uninsured.**

Non-citizens are more than twice as likely to be without health insurance coverage than naturalized citizens. In 2002, of the 12.8 million naturalized foreign born in the United States, 2.3 million or 18 percent were uninsured. By comparison, of the 20.6 million non-citizens, 8.9 million or 43 percent were uninsured. (See *Table 1 and Graph 1*)



Source: Current Population Survey, 2003 (Annual Social and Economic Supplement)

**Among the foreign born with health insurance coverage, most have private insurance.**

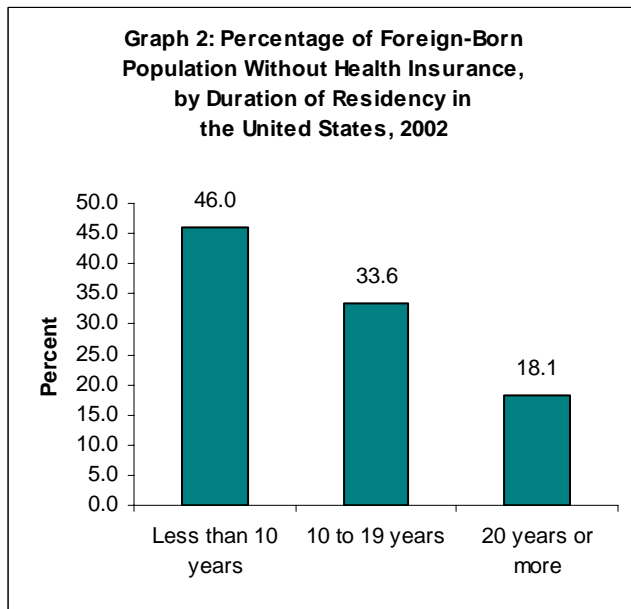
In 2002, of the 33.5 million foreign born, 22.3 million or 67 percent had health insurance coverage. Of those 22.3 million insured immigrants, 17.5 million, or more than three-fourths (78 percent), were covered by a private plan, such as employment-based or direct purchase, while 6.7 million or 30 percent were covered by a government insurance plan, such as Medicaid or Medicare.<sup>1</sup> (See *Table 1*)

**The longer immigrants live in the United States, the more likely they are to be insured.**

Among immigrants who in 2002 had resided in the United States for less than 10 years, 46 percent were uninsured. For immigrants who had lived in the United States for between 10 and 19 years, 34 percent were uninsured. Immigrants residing in the United States for more than 20 years were the most likely to be insured, with only 18 percent without health insurance coverage. (See *Table 2 and Graph 2*)

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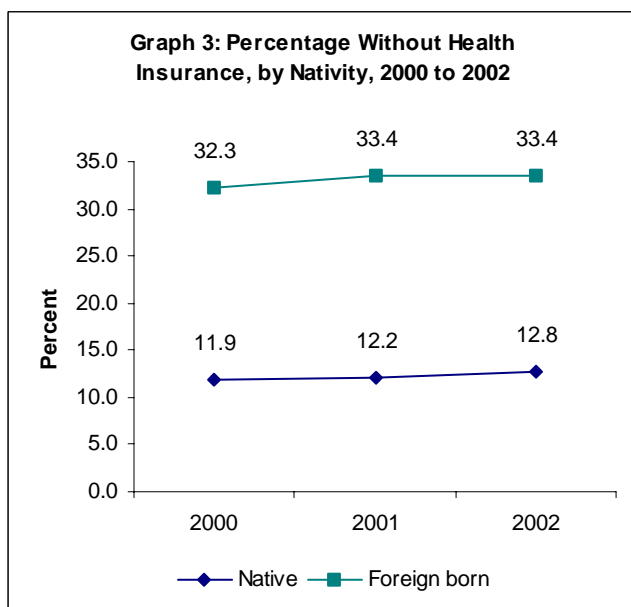
<sup>1</sup> Note that the percentage of immigrants covered by private insurance plans (78 percent) plus those covered by government insurance plans (30 percent) adds to greater than 100 percent. This is because estimates by type of coverage are not mutually exclusive; that is, people can be covered by more than one type of health insurance during the year.



Source: Current Population Survey, 2003 (Annual Social and Economic Supplement)

**The percentage of immigrants with no health insurance coverage changed little between 2000 and 2002, while the percentage for natives increased over the same period.**

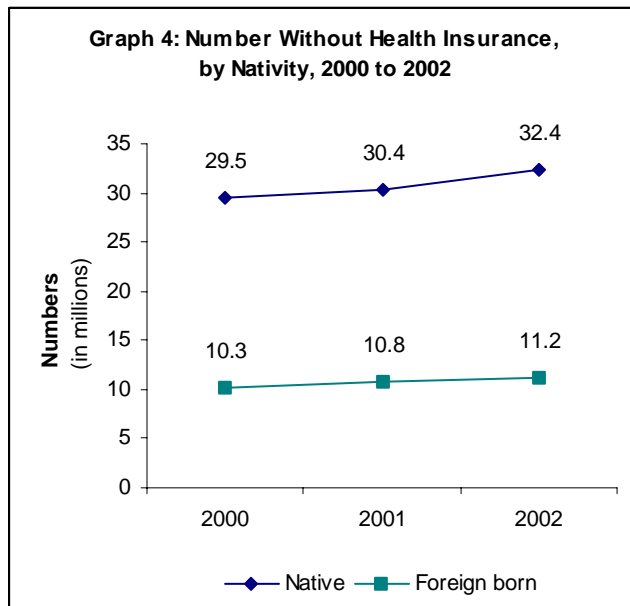
Between 2000 and 2002, the percentage of foreign born who were uninsured increased from 32.3 percent to 33.4 percent, but the change was not statistically significant. For natives, the percent uninsured increased from 11.9 percent in 2000 to 12.8 percent in 2002, which was statistically significant. (See Table 3 and Graph 3)



Source: Current Population Survey, 2001 to 2003 (Annual Social and Economic Supplement)

**However, the number of both uninsured immigrants and natives increased over the same time period.**

The number of immigrants without health insurance coverage increased from 10.3 million in 2000 to 11.2 million in 2002, representing an increase of 9 percent. The number of uninsured natives increased from 29.6 million in 2000 to 32.4 million in 2002, representing an increase of 10 percent. (See *Table 3 and Graph 4*)



Source: Current Population Survey, 2001 to 2003 (Annual Social and Economic Supplement)

**Table 1: Health Insurance Coverage Status, by Nativity and Citizenship Status, 2002** (in thousands)

Nativity and citizenship status	Number	Percent
Total population	285,933	100.0
Not covered	43,574	15.2
Covered <sup>1</sup>	242,360	84.8
Private health insurance	198,973	69.6
Government health insurance	73,624	25.7
Native	252,463	100.0
Not covered	32,388	12.8
Covered <sup>1</sup>	220,075	87.2
Private health insurance	181,503	71.9
Government health insurance	66,951	26.5
Foreign born	33,471	100.0
Not covered	11,186	33.4
Covered <sup>1</sup>	22,285	66.6
Private health insurance	17,470	52.2
Government health insurance	6,672	19.9
Naturalized citizens	12,837	100.0
Not covered	2,251	17.5
Covered <sup>1</sup>	10,586	82.5
Private health insurance	8,319	64.8
Government health insurance	3,548	27.6
Non-citizens	20,634	100.0
Not covered	8,935	43.3
Covered <sup>1</sup>	11,699	56.7
Private health insurance	9,151	44.3
Government health insurance	3,124	15.1

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2003 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (formerly known as the March Supplement). Respondents were asked about health insurance coverage *for the previous year* (e.g., estimates derived from the 2003 CPS data refer to health insurance coverage in 2002).

<sup>1</sup>Note that estimates by type of coverage (e.g., private or government health insurance) are not mutually exclusive. People can be covered by more than one type of health insurance plan during the year, and therefore the sum of the percentages by type of coverage may be greater than the percentage of those covered.

**Table 2: Foreign Born Without Health Insurance Coverage, by Duration of Residency in the United States, 2002** (in thousands)

Duration of residency	Foreign born		
	Total	Number without insurance	Percent of total
Total	33,471	11,186	33.4
Less than 10 years	13,359	6,143	46.0
10 to 19 years	9,039	3,034	33.6
20 years or more	11,073	2,008	18.1

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2003 Annual Social and Economic Supplement (formerly known as the March Supplement). Respondents were asked about health insurance coverage *for the previous year* (e.g., estimates derived from the 2003 CPS data refer to health insurance coverage in 2002).

**Table 3: People Without Health Insurance, by Nativity, 2000 to 2002** (in thousands)

Reference year	Total population	Uninsured		Native	Uninsured		Foreign born	Uninsured	
		Number	Percent		Number	Percent		Number	Percent
2000	279,517	39,804	14.2	247,706	29,529	11.9	31,811	10,275	32.3
2001	282,082	41,207	14.6	249,629	30,364	12.2	32,453	10,843	33.4
2002	285,933	43,574	15.2	252,463	32,388	12.8	33,471	11,186	33.4

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 2001 to 2003 Annual Social and Economic Supplements (formerly known as the March Supplements). Respondents were asked about health insurance coverage *for the previous year* (e.g., estimates derived from the 2003 CPS data refer to health insurance coverage in 2002).

## GLOSSARY

### Who are the foreign born?

The U.S. Census Bureau uses the term *foreign born* to refer to anyone who is not a U.S. citizen at birth. This includes foreign-born naturalized citizens as well as non-citizens. Non-citizens include all foreign born who have not naturalized, for example, legal permanent residents (immigrants), temporary migrants (such as students), humanitarian migrants (such as refugees), and persons illegally present in the United States.

By comparison, the term *native* refers to people residing in the United States who were United States citizens in one of three categories: (1) people born in one of the 50 states and the District of Columbia; (2) people born in the United States Insular Areas such as Puerto Rico or Guam; or (3) people who were born abroad to at least one parent who was a United States citizen.

### Type of Health Insurance Coverage

The Census Bureau broadly classifies health insurance coverage as either private (i.e., non-government) or government-sponsored.

*Private health insurance* is coverage by a health plan provided through an employer or union or purchased by an individual from a private health insurance company. *Employment-based health insurance* coverage is coverage offered through one's own employment or a relative's. It may be offered by an employer or by a union. *Direct-purchase health insurance* is coverage through a plan purchased by an individual from a private company.

*Government health insurance* includes plans funded by governments at the federal, state, or local level. The major categories of government health insurance are Medicare, Medicaid, the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), military health care, state plans, and the Indian Health Service (IHS). *Medicare* is the Federal program that helps pay health care costs for people 65 years of age and older and for certain people under age 65 with long-term disabilities. *Medicaid* is a program administered at the state level, which provides medical assistance to the needy. Families with dependent children, the aged, blind, and disabled who are in financial need are eligible for Medicaid. *SCHIP* is a program administered at the state level providing health care to low-income children whose parents do not qualify for Medicaid. *Military health care* includes TRICARE/CHAMPUS (Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Uniformed Services) and CHAMPVA (Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs), as well as care provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs. TRICARE/CHAMPUS is a military health care program for active duty and retired members of the uniformed services, their families, and survivors. CHAMPVA is a medical program through which the Department of Veterans Affairs helps pay for the medical services for eligible veterans, veteran's dependents, and survivors of veterans. The Department of Veterans Affairs provides medical assistance to eligible veterans of the Armed Forces. Some states have their own *state-specific health insurance programs* for low-income uninsured individuals. *IHS* is a health care program through which the Department of Health and Human Services provides medical assistance to eligible American

Indians at IHS facilities. In addition, IHS helps pay the cost of selected health care services provided at non-IHS facilities.

## **DATA SOURCES**

The estimates presented in this *Immigration Facts Sheet* are derived from the Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement (formerly called the Annual Demographic Supplement or the March Supplement), 2001 to 2003. The CPS is a monthly survey of about 50,000 households conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau for the Bureau of Labor Statistics, mainly to estimate the unemployment rate. The Annual Social and Economic Supplement to the CPS is a survey of about 78,000 households and includes detailed health insurance questions asked of the household respondent for every household resident. Respondents are asked about health insurance coverage *in the previous calendar year*. That is, the estimates derived from the 2003 CPS data refer to health insurance coverage in 2002.

## **Statistical Testing**

All statements made in this report have undergone statistical testing and are significant at the 90 percent confidence level.

## **ADDITIONAL SOURCES**

Mills, Robert J. and Shailesh Bhandari, U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, Series P60-223, *Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2002*. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., September 2003. The full report and additional data are available online at: [www.census.gov/hhes/www/hlthin02.html](http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/hlthin02.html).

This information was compiled by Elizabeth Grieco, MPI's Senior Demographer, in June 2004. For questions or to arrange an interview with a data expert or policy analyst, please contact Colleen Coffey, Communications Coordinator, at 202-266-1910 or [ccoffey@migrationpolicy.org](mailto:ccoffey@migrationpolicy.org). Please visit us at [www.migrationpolicy.org](http://www.migrationpolicy.org).

For more information on immigration to the United States and worldwide, visit the Migration Information Source, MPI's online publication, at [www.migrationinformation.org](http://www.migrationinformation.org). The Source provides fresh thought, authoritative data from numerous global organizations and governments, and global analysis of international migration trends.



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