

Immediate Release

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More Live in Poverty, Less Have Health Coverage in Mountain State State Needs to Take Action

[Charleston, WV] – There are more West Virginians living in poverty and trying to survive without health care, according to data released today from the Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey.

An estimated average of 17.2 percent of West Virginians lived in poverty in 2010-2011, up from 15.2 percent in 2008-2009. This ranks West Virginia higher than the national average of 15.0 percent and 9th highest among the 50 states.

“There are too many West Virginia families struggling to get by and ahead, and not enough action by state policymakers to grow opportunity for all,” said Stuart Frazier, Policy Analyst with the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy. “If we could enact a state earned income tax credit or raise the minimum wage this would dramatically improve the lives of low-income working families in the state.”

Almost 30,000 more people are without health insurance now as compared to three years ago. The percentage of working-age adults—from age 18 to 64—in West Virginia without health insurance rose from 15.5 percent in 2010 to 17.1 percent. Roughly one in six adults did not have health insurance coverage at any time in 2011.

“Full implementation of health reform including the expansion of Medicaid to low-income West Virginians will cover almost all the state’s uninsured and increase the economic security of all West Virginians,” stated Renate Pore, Health Policy Director for the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy.

“The new Census data provide another warning that West Virginia needs to change course and adopt policies that invest in infrastructure, education and innovation to encourage strong economic growth, create good jobs and foster shared prosperity,” said Ted Boettner, Executive Director of the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy. “The data to be released next week will further show that without important public investments like the federal earned income tax credit, Medicaid, and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance, that the impact of poverty in West Virginia would be far more severe.”

On September 20, 2012, the U.S. Census Bureau will release the American Community Survey (ACS) data. This is similar but not the same as the Current Population Survey (CPS) data released today. The surveys pose different questions at different times of the year to different populations. The CPS uses a smaller sample size, which provides sufficient information on a national level, but is less detailed on the state level. It is necessary to average together two years of state level data from the CPS in order to provide the most accurate estimation. However, the ACS uses a much larger sample size, which makes it a better source for state-level trends and rankings. The September 20 data will provide a much more detailed view of poverty, income, and health insurance coverage on the state level.

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The West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy (www.wvpolicy.org) is a public policy research organization that is nonpartisan, nonprofit, and statewide. The Center focuses on how policy decisions affect all West Virginians, especially low- and moderate-income families.