

How Does Uninsurance Vary among Asian American/Pacific Islander Parents?

Jennifer M. Haley, Genevieve M. Kenney, Clare Wang Pan, and Elizabeth Grazevich

Since 2014, Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) have experienced declines in uninsurance under implementation of key provisions of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), which included expanded subsidized coverage options for adults.¹ By 2019, AAPI parents were less likely to be uninsured than parents in any other racial or ethnic group.² But despite AAPIs' fast population growth between 2000 and 2019,³ the relatively small size of this population means data are seldom disaggregated by national origin.⁴ AAPI parents' low overall uninsurance rate masks variation in uninsurance across AAPI national-origin groups, limiting understanding about the diversity of AAPI communities and the AAPI communities facing greater challenges accessing needed health care. Here we use 2018–19 American Community Survey data to examine uninsurance rates among non-Hispanic parents who are AAPI or AAPI and another race by national origin.

Findings

An estimated 5.8 percent of AAPI parents (294,000 parents) were uninsured in 2018–19 (figure 1),⁵ compared with 11.5 percent of parents overall (data not shown). But AAPI parents' uninsurance varied dramatically by national origin, ranging from 3.2 and 3.4 percent for Japanese and Indian parents to 14.3 and 16.9 percent for Nepalese and Burmese parents. In addition, 13.8 percent of AAPI parents, and 20.6 percent of Korean parents, with family incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level were uninsured.

Uninsurance was twice as high among noncitizen AAPI parents as among their citizen counterparts (8.8 versus 4.3 percent), and 50.1 percent of uninsured AAPI parents were noncitizens (data not shown). Immigration-related restrictions could limit their eligibility for publicly subsidized coverage and contribute to uninsurance. Moreover, AAPI parents who reported not speaking English well had much higher uninsurance rates than parents who speak English well (14.8 versus 4.7 percent); that 28.7 percent of uninsured AAPI parents reported not speaking English well (data not shown) suggests language may also be a barrier to accessing culturally competent health care.

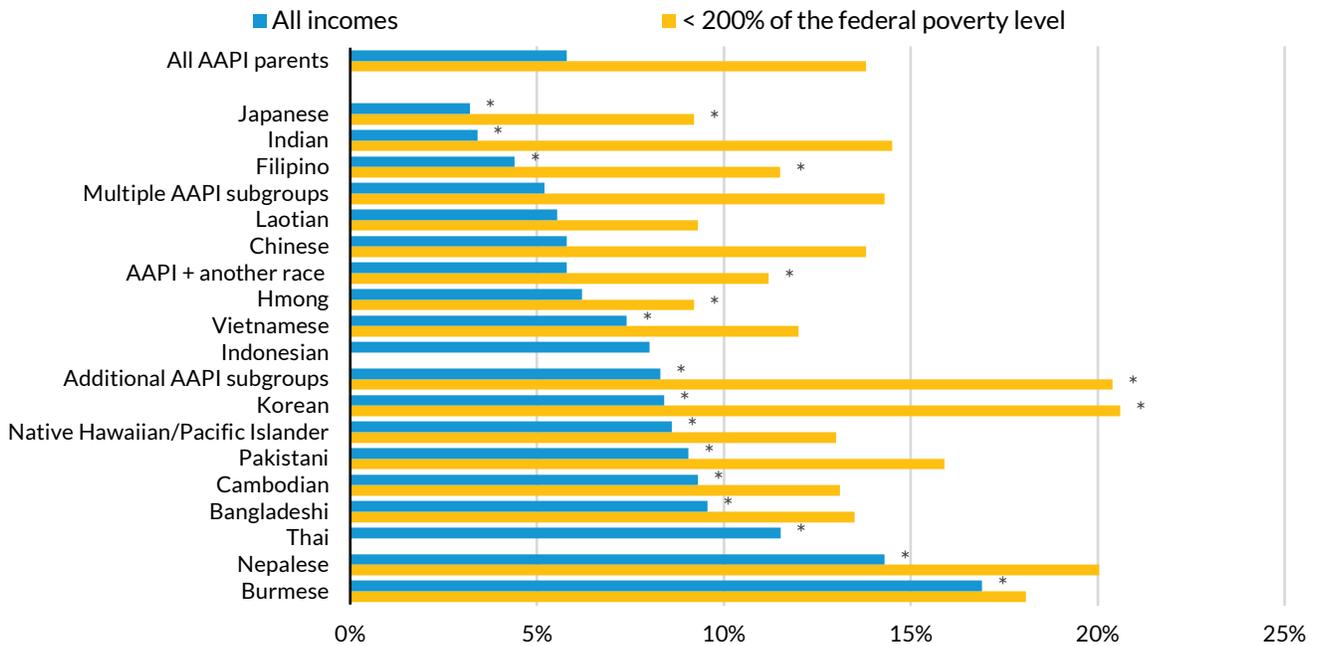
Conclusions

AAPI parents' uninsurance rate, like that for children,⁶ hides large disparities by national origin. These disparities are partly associated with differences in citizenship status, work status, and other structural factors,⁷ and they highlight the need to disaggregate data to reveal differences in access to needed care across subgroups of parents.

Targeting outreach and enrollment assistance to uninsured AAPI parents in languages beyond English and Spanish could help reach and enroll those who speak other languages who qualify for subsidized health insurance coverage such as Medicaid. Forging tighter connections between safety net providers, AAPI community-based organizations, and stakeholders working to advance equity could also help better meet the health needs of AAPI parents ineligible for subsidized coverage because of their immigration status or income.⁸ Rising unemployment and the alarming increase in anti-Asian racist violence during the pandemic and associated trauma and stress add urgency to ensuring AAPI families have the access to needed care and security that health insurance can provide.

FIGURE 1

Uninsurance Rates among Non-Hispanic Asian American/Pacific Islander Parents Ages 19 to 64, by National Origin and Family Income, 2018–19



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Urban Institute analysis of 2018–19 American Community Survey (ACS) data from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series reflecting an adjustment for potential misreporting of coverage.

Notes: AAPI = Asian American/Pacific Islander. An estimated 294,000 AAPI parents were uninsured in 2018–19, including those identified as AAPI and another race. National origin refers to category selections or write-in responses to the ACS question about race. “Additional AAPI subgroups” refers to those with unspecified AAPI national origin or in categories with sample sizes too small (< 250) for separate analysis. We do not present the rate for Thai and Indonesian parents with family incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level because of small sample size.

* The subgroup’s rate is significantly different from the overall AAPI rate at the 0.05 level. Estimates and standard errors available upon request.

¹ Rose C. Chu and Benjamin D. Sommers, “Health Insurance Coverage Changes since Implementation of the Affordable Care Act: Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders” (Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, 2021).

² Jennifer M. Haley, Genevieve M. Kenney, Clare Wang Pan, Robin Wang, Victoria Lynch, and Matthew Buettgens. “Uninsurance Rose among Children and Parents in 2019: National and State Patterns” (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2021).

³ Abby Budiman and Neil G. Ruiz, “Asian Americans Are the Fastest-Growing Racial or Ethnic Group in the U.S.,” Pew Research Center, April 9, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/09/asian-americans-are-the-fastest-growing-racial-or-ethnic-group-in-the-u-s/>.

⁴ Jonathan Schwabish and Alice Feng, “Combining Racial Groups in Data Analysis Can Mask Important Differences in Communities,” *Urban Wire* (blog), Urban Institute, March 22, 2021, <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/combining-racial-groups-data-analysis-can-mask-important-differences-communities>.

⁵ Total includes parents who are AAPI and another race. Excluding such parents, AAPI parents’ uninsurance rate would be 5.8 percent (14.2 percent among those with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level), representing 263,000 adults.

⁶ Jennifer M. Haley, Genevieve M. Kenney, Clare Wang Pan, and Elizabeth Grazevich, “How Does Uninsurance Vary among Asian American/Pacific Islander Children?” (Washington, DC: 2021).

⁷ Chu and Sommers, “Coverage Changes since the Affordable Care Act: Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.”

⁸ LesLeigh D. Ford, Bhavani Arabandi, Cary Lou, Janelle Wong, and Aryani Ong, *Advancing Equity for AAPI Communities: Results and Recommendations from a Landscape Study of Asian American and Pacific Islander Organizations* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2021).