

Project ID: IIR 06-238-2

Title: Health and Economic Outcomes for Uninsured Non-Elderly Veterans

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1) Anticipated Impacts on Veterans' Healthcare

This project will enhance VA's understanding of the non-elderly veteran population, particularly the sub-population that does not use VA care. As such, results will assist VA administrators plan for the future needs of veterans. The study will also be of relevance to researchers as it will develop methods for validating and using Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS) data for a VA population.

2) Project Background/Rationale

This project will study health and economic outcomes for non-elderly veterans who may or may not use the VA but are otherwise uninsured. In doing so, this project will fill a void in the research literature, which has largely ignored the unique characteristics and health care options of the uninsured veteran population. The large body of research on the uninsured non-elderly documents poorer outcomes for individuals lacking health insurance. While veterans are not exempt from the barriers to insurance (e.g., lack of employer offer, low income, high premiums) some are able to turn to VA-provided care as an alternative to other sources. In our prior work we have found that veterans who do receive care at the VA are about two times more likely than the general population and about four times more likely than other veterans to have no other source of coverage. Hence, this population is particularly vulnerable to the changes in VA eligibility and benefits. The overarching question that the proposed project addresses is: to what extent does the VA meet the need for high-quality health care for otherwise uninsured veterans?

3) Project Objectives

This 1.5-year study will use multiple years of MEPS data to meet three objectives:

Objective 1: Develop methods to identify VA patients and investigate patterns of insurance coverage for non-elderly veterans.

Objective 2: Develop and estimate multivariate models of insurance status and use of VA care.

Objective 3: Develop and estimate multivariate models of health and economic outcomes as a function of being uninsured and/or using VA care.

4) Project Methods

This study uses existing survey data and other publicly available data to achieve its objectives. We will estimate statistical models using multiple years of MEPS data linked to characteristics of state Medicaid programs, local unemployment rates, and other publicly available geographic data. The first objective is descriptive and will focus on quantifying basic characteristics of the population under study: uninsured veterans. The second and third objectives develop multivariate statistical models that, together, will relate insurance status and VA use to health and economic outcomes, controlling for observable and unobservable baseline characteristics.