



# The Health Care Blog

Everything you always wanted to know about the Health Care system. But were afraid to ask.

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## Health Insurance and Life Expectancy



By **JOHN GOODMAN**

Did you know that Hispanic Americans live longer than non-Hispanic whites? If that doesn't knock your socks off, consider this: American Hispanics are three times as likely to be uninsured as non-Hispanic whites.

If you're still not blown away, maybe you haven't been following the twists and turns of the health policy debate. As I wrote at my blog the other day, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) discovery that Hispanics (one-third of whom are uninsured) have a life expectancy that is 2 1/2 years longer than whites (90% of whom have health insurance) makes mincemeat out of the oft-repeated idea that the uninsured get less health care and die earlier than everyone else.

In support of the conventional wisdom, for example, the Physicians for a National Health Care Program (PNHCP) went so far as to claim that a whopping 45,000 people die every year because they are uninsured. That figure, repeated as though it were unquestioned fact by President Obama and most of the health care media, is almost as large as the number of American soldiers killed in the entire Vietnam War!

Families USA went so far as to make the astounding claim that 6 people die every day in Florida because they are uninsured. Eight die every day in California; and 25 die in New York. In Texas, the report implies that more people die every two months from lack of health insurance than the number killed at the battle of the Alamo (counting only losses on our side, that is). Nationwide, says the PNHCP, an uninsured person dies every 12 minutes.

With all this carnage, you might wonder whether there are any uninsured people left alive.

All of this nonsense is critiqued here. But don't get me wrong. One of the joys of health economics is that you just don't get this kind of entertainment in other economic fields. For sheer comedic amusement, health economics is *sui generis*.

The latest government report also completely blows out of the water a whole slew of international comparisons that cause a lot of commentators to froth at the mouth. Take the 1,000 or so U.S.-health-care-system-bashing studies, essays and opinion pieces (or is it 10,000? I can't remember) that claim we're getting short-changed because we spend more and die earlier. Turns out, these comparisons were mainly focused on *insured people*. Had they looked instead at the U.S. ethnic group most likely to be *uninsured* they would have had to eat their words. American Hispanics probably *spend less* on health care than people in other developed countries and they *live longer!*

As the table below shows, American Hispanics outlive Canadians and the British, to say nothing of Germans, the Irish, the Finns and the Belgians. Overall, Hispanics in the United States live a year and a half longer than the OECD average life expectancy. (All numbers are from 2006, to conform to the CDC study.)

## Life Expectancy, 2006 (years)

Japan	82.4	Finland	79.5
Switzerland	81.7	Belgium	79.5
Iceland	81.2	Luxembourg	79.4
Australia	81.1	UK	79.1
Spain	81.1	Korea	79.1
France	80.9	<b>OECD Average</b>	<b>79.0</b>
Sweden	80.8	Portugal	78.9
<b>US Hispanics</b>	<b>80.6</b>	Denmark	78.4
Norway	80.6	<b>United States</b>	77.8
Canada*	80.4	Italy	n/a
New Zealand	79.9	Czech Republic	76.7
Austria	79.9	Mexico	75.7
Germany	79.8	Poland	75.3
Netherlands	79.8	Slovak Republic	74.3
Ireland	79.7	Hungary	73.2
Greece	79.6	Turkey	71.6

\*2005 data.

Sources: OECD Health Data 2008 and CDC.

It is not known why so many Hispanics are uninsured, but the phenomenon is not explained by lower incomes. Census Bureau statistics show that at every level of income, Hispanics are two to three times as likely to be uninsured as the population as a whole, and *the higher the income level, the greater the discrepancy.*

Now if we did research at the NCPA the way Families USA does research, we would be claiming that lack of insurance actually makes people live longer! I can see the press release now....."90,000 People Alive Today because They Didn't Insure, Says Study"..... An estimated million, billion, trillion extra life years, all because of..... 12 extra people walk the streets of Florida every day..... That's XXX people who didn't die every minute.....YYY every second.....ZZZ every nanosecond.....

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*enterprise, private sector solutions to health care problems are discussed by top health policy experts from all sides of the political spectrum.*