

Chapter 3

Access to Health Care in South Texas

Adequate access to health care services, including preventive services and treatment for illnesses, is critical to achieving positive health outcomes. Two major limitations of adequate access to care are a lack of health insurance coverage and a shortage of health care providers in certain areas [1, 2].

Lack of Health Insurance

Lack of health insurance coverage is a significant barrier to seeking and receiving health care [2, 3]. Nationwide, Hispanics and young adults aged 18–24 are more likely to be uninsured than other demographic groups [1, 4].

Using Texas Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) survey data, an estimated 30 % of South Texas adult residents were uninsured during 2007–2010. South Texas had a higher percentage of uninsured residents than the rest of Texas (23 %). Both South Texas and the rest of Texas had a higher percentage of uninsured residents than the nationwide BRFSS estimate of about 15 % (Fig. 3.1). During 2007–2010, the estimated South Texas uninsured rate was almost twice as high as the national rate.

In South Texas during 2007–2010, Hispanics and African-Americans had higher percentages of uninsured individuals than did non-Hispanic whites. South Texas Hispanics had the highest uninsured rate (40.8 %) of all race/ethnic groups. The percentage of Hispanics with no health care was almost 3.5 times higher than for non-Hispanic whites, and twice as high for African Americans (Fig. 3.2).

In 2007–2010, estimates indicate that half of adults aged 18–29 in South Texas had no health insurance (Fig. 3.3), the highest rate among all age groups. The percentage of individuals with no health insurance dropped steadily with age (Fig. 3.3).

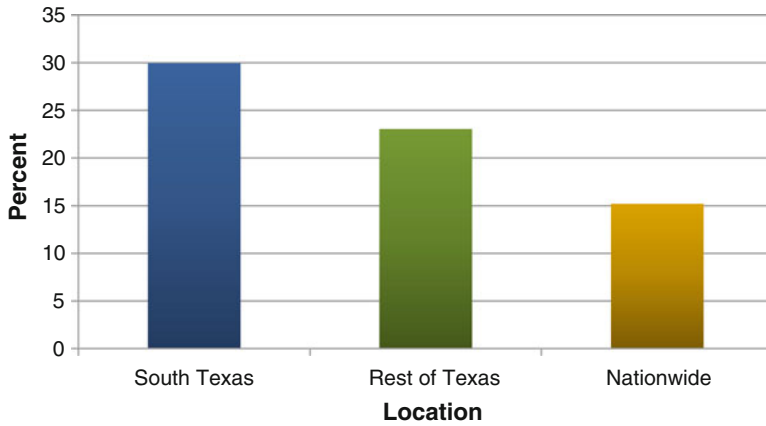


Fig. 3.1 Estimated percent of the adult population (18+) with no health insurance by location, 2007–2010. *Source:* Texas Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Combined Year Dataset, Statewide BRFSS Survey, 2007–2010

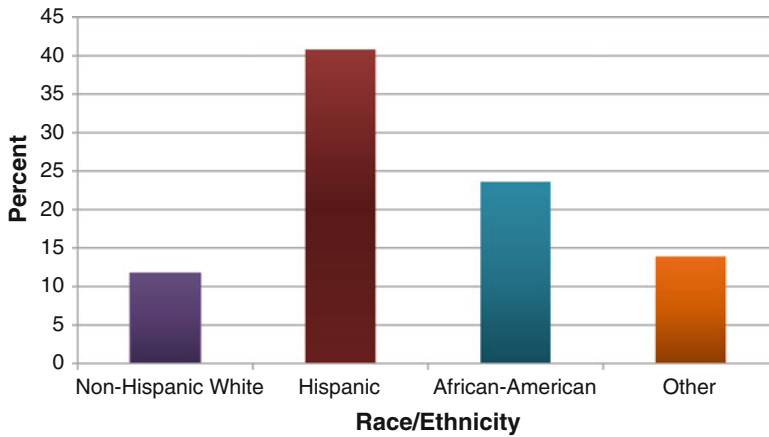


Fig. 3.2 Estimated percent of adult (18+) South Texas population with no health insurance by race/ethnicity, 2007–2010. *Source:* Texas Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Combined Year Dataset, Statewide BRFSS Survey, 2007–2010

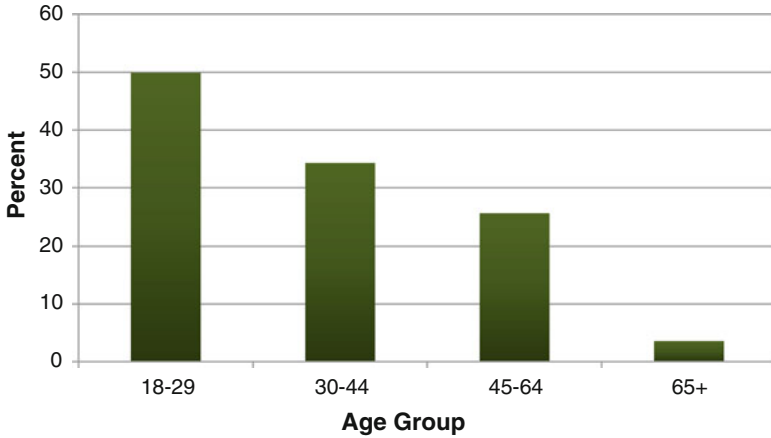


Fig. 3.3 Estimated percent of the adult (18+) South Texas population with no health insurance by age group, 2007–2010. *Source:* Texas Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Combined Year Dataset, Statewide BRFSS Survey, 2007–2010

Health Professional Shortage Areas

Another major barrier to receiving adequate health care is a shortage of health care providers in certain locations. Twenty-four of the 38 South Texas counties are currently designated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as (whole county service area) primary care health professional shortage areas (HPSAs) [5].

The counties designated as primary care HPSAs in South Texas are shown in Fig. 3.4. The HPSAs in this list are mostly nonmetropolitan counties. However, a few metropolitan counties (such as Atascosa, Bandera, Medina, and Wilson) are designated as HPSAs, so a shortage of health professionals is also a problem in some South Texas metropolitan areas [5].

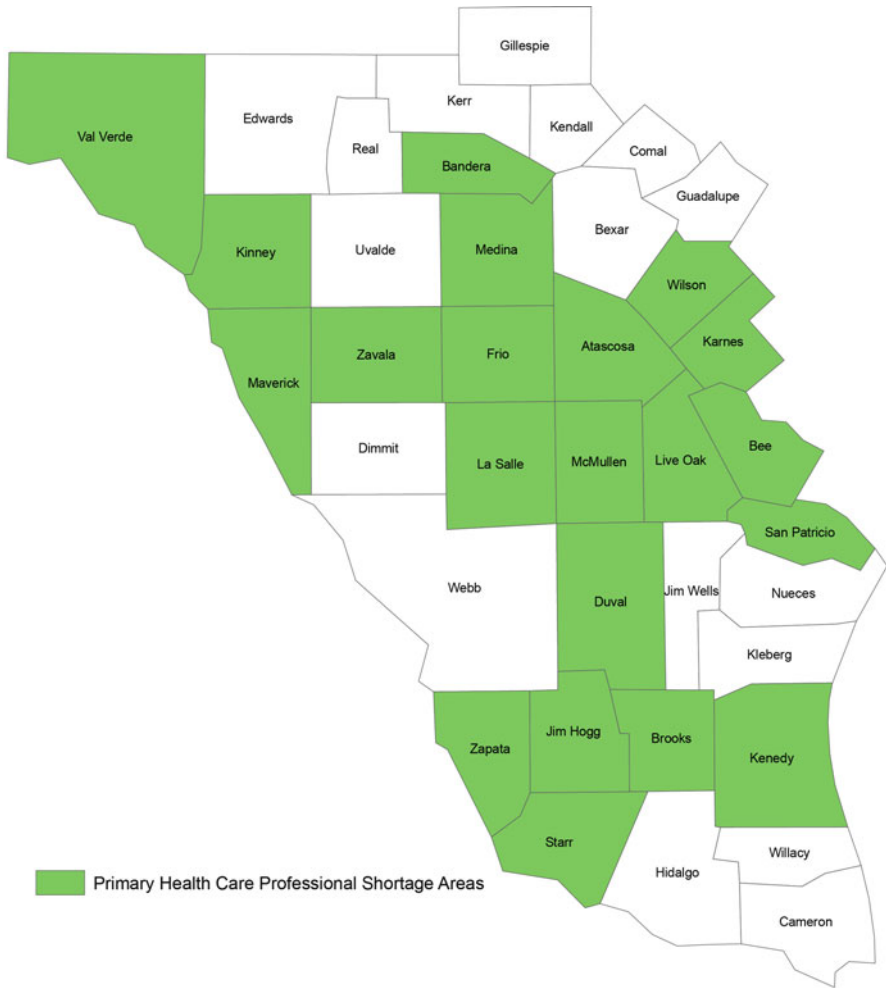


Fig. 3.4 Map of designated whole county primary care health professional shortage areas in South Texas, 2010

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