EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Employment Status of Workers Ages 55 or Older, 1987–2008

OLDER WORKERS STAYING IN THE WORK FORCE LONGER: A growing percentage of older Americans are in the labor force: The percentage of those ages 55 or older in the labor force increased from 29.4 percent in 1993 to 39.4 percent in 2008. For those ages 65–69, the percentage increased from 18.4 percent in 1985 to 30.7 percent in 2006. These trends mark a significant change in behavior for individuals in these age groups, and are likely driven by their need to obtain affordable employment-based health insurance and to accumulate retirement savings.

MORE PART-TIME WORK: While older workers working full time, full year increased steadily from 1993–2007, that trend ended with the recession year of 2008. While members of the older population were more likely to work in 2008, they were less likely to be working full time, full year in 2008 after consistent increases through 2007.

Tracking Health Insurance Coverage by Month: Trends in Employment-Based Coverage Among Workers, and Access to Coverage Among Uninsured Workers

HEALTH COVERAGE ON A MONTHLY BASIS: This analysis examines employment-based health benefit coverage rates on a monthly basis from December 1995 to March 2009, to allow for more accurate identification of changes in trends, and to more clearly show the effects of recessions and unemployment on changes in coverage.

RECESSION PERIODS: Between December 2007–May 2008, the percentage of workers with coverage in their own name fell from 60.4 percent to 56.8 percent. The recession officially started in December 2007. The period between May 2008–March 2009 shows a continuing decline in the percentage of workers with employment-based coverage in their own name, falling to 55.7 percent by March 2009. Unlike the December 2007–December 2009 period, which saw a drop in employment-based coverage, the recession of 2001 produced very little change in coverage.

ECONOMY AND OTHER FACTORS AFFECT HEALTH COVERAGE: The likelihood of a worker being uninsured is tied to the strength of the economy and the unemployment rate, but uninsured workers reported multiple reasons for not having coverage. Most workers reported that they did not have coverage because of cost, and those doing so ranged from 70 percent to 90 percent over the December 1995–March 2009 period. The percentage of uninsured workers reporting that they were not offered employment-based health benefits was roughly 40 percent through 2003, and has been falling since then, reaching 24 percent in early 2009.
Introduction

Workers who have access to retirement plans and retiree health insurance through their employment face increasing responsibility for contributing to these benefits. Consequently, they need to save more of their income for these purposes. The main option for doing that is to delay retirement and remain in the labor force, so as to postpone the need to pay these expenses and continue to accumulate savings.

In fact, an increasing percentage of older Americans are in the labor force: The percentage of those ages 55 or older in the labor force increased from 29.4 percent in 1993 to 39.4 percent in 2008. For those ages 65–69, the percentage increased from 18.4 percent in 1985 to 30.7 percent in 2006.

These trends mark a significant change in behavior for individuals in these age groups, and are likely driven by their need to obtain affordable employment-based health insurance (as opposed to unaffordable or unavailable coverage in the individual market for those not Medicare eligible) and the need to continue to accumulate savings in employment-based defined contribution retirement plans (principally 401(k)-type plans).

This article examines the employment status (full time, part time, or part year) of these older (age 55 or older) workers, using the latest March Current Population Survey data. The data show that the percentage of these older workers working full time, full year increased steadily from 1993–2007, before decreasing during the recession year of 2008 as employers shed jobs and the national unemployment rate climbed. Consequently, while members of the older population were more likely to work, they were less likely to be working full time, full year in 2008 after consistent increases through 2007. The full-time, full-year work trend is more closely examined across various demographic categories.

Overall

The percentage of workers age 55 or older who work full time, full year steadily increased from 54.2 percent in 1993 to 66.0 percent in 2007, before a decline in 2008 to 63.9 percent (Figure 1). The percentage of workers in this age group who were part-time, full-year workers has remained virtually constant from 1987–2008 at approximately 13–14 percent. Those who worked only part year, either full time or part time, declined from 32.0 percent in 1990 to 20.9 percent in 2007; this increased to 22.7 percent in 2008.

Gender

When examining this trend by gender, the same result holds true for both male and female workers: increasing full-time, full-year work through 2007, and then decreasing in 2008. The percentage of male workers age 55 or older working full time, full year increased from 60.5 percent in 1993 to 71.7 percent in 2007 and then decreased to 69.2 percent in 2008 (Figure 2). Female workers had an even larger percentage-point increase, going from 46.6 percent in 1993 to 59.7 percent in 2007, and a smaller decline in 2008, to 58.0 percent. The percentage working part year also decreased for both genders through 2007 before increasing in 2008. However, the percentage of females working part time, full year decreased from 19.6 percent in 1987 to 17.7 percent in 2008, while the percentage of male workers working part time, full year remained relatively flat from 8.9 percent in 1987 to 9.4 percent in 2008.

Age

Each five-year age group among workers age 55 or older showed an increase in the percentage working full time, full year through 2007, before declines in each age group except for those ages 70–74 (Figure 3). However, as the workers became older, the likelihood that they were working full time, full year decreased. Workers ages 65–69 had...
### Figure 1

**Work Status of Workers Age 55 or Older, 1987–2008**

![Graph showing work status of workers age 55 or older, 1987–2008.](image)


### Figure 2

**Work Status of Workers Age 55 or Older, by Gender, 1987–2008**

![Graph showing work status of workers age 55 or older, by gender, 1987–2008.](image)

Figure 3
Percentage of Workers Age 55 or Older Working Full-time, Full-year, by Age, 1987–2008


Figure 4
Percentage of Workers Age 55 or Older Working Part-time, Full-year, by Age, 1987–2008

the largest percentage point increase in working full time, full year, from 36.4 percent in 1987 to 51.6 percent in 2007 (decreasing to 49.8 percent in 2008). Workers in the age 70–74 group also showed a significant increase in full-time, full-year work, including a small increase in 2008 (27.6 percent in 1987 to 39.6 percent in 2008).

For part-time, full-year employment, the percentages remained relatively constant for those in the 55–59 and 60–64 age groups (Figure 4). For those age 65–74, the percentage of workers working part time, full year declined from 1987–2008, while for those 75 or older the rate increased from 27.8 percent in 1987 to 30.8 percent in 2008.

Across each age group, the percentage of workers working part year decreased from 1987 to 2008, albeit with each age group having an increase from 2007–2008 (Figure 5). The oldest workers had the largest declines in the percentage working part year, which corresponds to their larger increases in full-year work (both full time and part time).

**Race/ Ethnicity**
Across each race/ethnicity category, the percentage of workers age 55 or older working full time, full year increased from 1987 to 2008, with the percentage in each group declining in 2008 except for workers in the “other” category, which includes Asian Americans (Figure 6). Black workers had the largest percentage point increase, from 52.7 percent in 1987 to 66.7 percent in 2008. White workers this age had the lowest percentage working full time, full year, and had one of the smallest increases in this work status from 1987 to 2008.

**Educational Level**
Across each educational level, the percentage of those working full time, full year increased from 1987 to 2008, with a decrease from 2007–2008 (Figure 7). The workers with higher educational attainment were more likely to work full time, full year, with those having a college degree having the highest percentage at 68.2 percent in 2008. Although the more highly educated were most likely to be working full time, full year, they posted the smallest increases in this category between 1987 and 2008. Those workers age 55 or older with some college had the highest percentage-point increase in working full time, full year, rising from 57.4 percent in 1987 to 64.9 percent in 2008.

**Conclusion**
The employment status of workers age 55 or older has significantly moved toward full-time, full-year work—with a corresponding decline in part-time, part-year work—over the 21-year period from 1987 to 2008. This trend was found across all groups age 55 or older, all race /ethnicity categories, and all educational levels. Younger near-elderly/elderly workers were far more likely to be working full time, full year, but older workers had larger percentage-point increases in full-time, full-year work from 1987 to 2008.

As mentioned above, the percentage of workers age 55 or older in the labor force increased from 1987 to 2008. This increase, combined with the greater prevalence of full-time, full-year work among those employed at these ages, shows a significant change in behavior for individuals in this age group. This trend is likely being driven by the cost of health insurance, which is far more expensive and sometimes unavailable on an individual basis compared with employment-based coverage. Furthermore, the private-sector shift to defined contribution retirement plans (funded in a large part by workers’ own contributions) and away from defined benefit pension plans (funded almost exclusively by employers) is a likely factor, as individuals may not have accumulated enough funds in their account or do not feel comfortable tapping into their retirement account, but instead need to continue to work to further build up assets or delay tapping into these funds.

In 2008, the upward trend in full-time, full-year work that had prevailed through 2007 reversed itself, as the economy took a major downward turn. While the overall trend over the two decades (from 1987–2008) is still up, the percentage of older employees working full time, full year declined in 2008 as workers lost jobs during the year. Another year of decreased full-time, full-year work is likely for 2009, given the high unemployment and slow economic growth last year. However, the trend of increased full-time, full-year work is likely to continue as the economy...
Figure 5
Percentage of Workers Age 55 or Older Working Part-year, by Age, 1987–2008


Figure 6
Percentage of Workers Age 55 or Older Working Full-time, Full-year, by Race/Ethnicity, 1987–2008

recovers, since private-sector employers have been phasing out retiree health insurance for younger workers and, for the most part, have shifted out of defined benefit pensions and into defined contribution retirement plans. Therefore, the well-documented aging of the labor force that is now underway will most likely continue, if not accelerate, as the first members of the post-World War II baby boom generation have now surpassed age 60.

Endnotes


2 The U.S. Census Bureau conducts the Current Population Survey (CPS) for the Bureau of Labor Statistics by interviewing about 57,000 households and asking numerous questions about individuals’ work status, income, and basic demographic characteristics. Therefore, the CPS provides detailed information about workers from a broad sample of Americans, making it possible to establish a consistent annual and timely trend across numerous worker characteristics.
Tracking Health Insurance Coverage by Month: Trends in Employment-Based Coverage Among Workers, and Access to Coverage Among Uninsured Workers

By Paul Fronstin, Employee Benefit Research Institute

Introduction

There is a strong link between health benefits and employment. As a result, employment-based health benefits are the most common form of health insurance for nonpoor and nonelderly individuals in the United States. In 2008, 61.1 percent of nonelderly individuals were covered by an employment-based health benefits plan, with 70.3 percent of workers covered, 61.1 percent of nonworking adults covered, and 56.1 percent of children covered (Fronstin, 2009).

Since the 1980s, the percentage of individuals without health insurance coverage has generally been increasing, in large part because rising health benefit costs eroded employment-based coverage. However, for a few years during the late 1990s, the percentage of workers and their families with employment-based coverage increased and the percentage without health insurance declined, in large part due to the strong economy and low unemployment.

While the percentage of workers with coverage has ebbed and flowed with the economy and health care costs, trends in the percentage of workers offered coverage and the percentage of workers taking coverage when offered have remained steady. Prior research had shown that the percentage of workers offered health benefits had been increasing, but the take-up rate had been declining (Fronstin, 2007).

The purpose of this analysis is to examine the state of employment-based health benefits. Coverage rates are examined on a monthly basis from December 1995 to March 2009. This appears to be the first attempt to examine trends in coverage on a monthly basis over this long of time period. Examining these data on a monthly basis allows more accurate identification of changes in trends, and can also more clearly indicate the effects of recessions and unemployment on changes in coverage. Trends in offer rates and reasons for being uninsured among uninsured workers are also examined.

Trends in Employment-Based Health Coverage

Figure 1 shows the percentage of wage and salary workers ages 18-64 with employment-based health benefits either in their own name or covered as a dependent. There was very little change between December 1995 and December 2007 in the percentage of workers covered both in their own name and as a dependent. The percentage of workers with coverage in their own name increased slightly from just below 60 percent in the second half of 1996 to slightly above 61 percent in 1998. Between February 1998 and September 2002, the percentage of workers with coverage in their own name bounced around between 60.5 percent and 61.8 percent. A gradual decline in coverage started in October 2002, and between January 2004 and December 2007, the percentage of workers with coverage in their own name was mostly below 60 percent.

Between December 2007 and May 2008, the percentage of workers with coverage in their own name fell from 60.4 percent to 56.8 percent, but there are no data in between to determine if this was a gradual trend or a one-time drop. The recession officially started in December 2007. The period between May 2008 and March 2009 shows a continuing decline in the percentage of workers with employment-based coverage in their own name, falling to 55.7 percent by March 2009. Unlike the December 2007–December 2009 period, which saw a drop in employment-based coverage, the recession of 2001 produced very little change in coverage. The difference may be due to relative changes in the unemployment rates in these two recessions, as discussed below.
Changes in the percentage of workers with employment-based coverage as a dependent occurred throughout this period as well; however, the decline was less pronounced than during the December 2007–December 2009 recession. Between December 1995 and late 1999, the percentage of workers covered as a dependent increased from 17.4 percent to nearly 20 percent. It then declined during 2000 to about 18 percent. The percentage of workers with coverage as a dependent remained at about 18 percent through Sept. 2003, but then declined to between 16 percent and 17 percent during the October 2003–December 2007 period. It remained in the 16–17 percent range during the December 2007–December 2009 recession.

**Workers Without Health Insurance**

It is clear that the likelihood of a worker being uninsured is tied to the strength of the economy and the unemployment rate. Between late 1995 and early 2000, the percentage of workers without health insurance coverage had been falling. During December 1995–October 1996, the uninsured rate for workers was in the low-15 percent range (Figure 2). The uninsured rate was in the mid-14 percent range between November 1996 and September 1997. It fell to the upper-13 percent range during 1998, and was in the low 13 percent range during 1999 and early 2000.

Unemployment bottomed out at 3.9 percent in late 2000, and continued increasing during the recession of 2001. At the same time, the uninsured rate among workers increased to the low- and mid-14 percent range, and did not recover until 2004. From mid-2002 to fall 2003, the uninsured rate for workers was in the upper 14 percent range, and from fall 2003 to summer 2004 it was in the 15–16 percent range. From summer 2004 through February 2007, the uninsured rate ranged from the upper-14 percent to low-15 percent range, and in mid-2007 it was in the low-14 percent range. The beginnings of the recession in late 2007 put the uninsured rate back in the upper-14 percent range, and during May 2008–March 2009 it ranged from high-17 percent to nearly 19 percent.

**Why Workers Are Uninsured**

Uninsured workers were asked a series of questions regarding why they were not covered. They were asked about access to employment-based coverage and whether they were ineligible for coverage offered to other workers or declined coverage when it was available. Workers with insurance from other sources such as employment-based coverage as a dependent, those who purchased coverage directly from an insurer, and those covered by public sources of coverage were not asked the series of questions on why they did not have coverage. Some of the questions pertain to employment-based coverage specifically, but some can be applied more generally, like those related to cost and declining coverage.

Uninsured workers reported multiple reasons for not having coverage. Most workers reported that they did not have coverage because of cost, and those doing so ranged from 70 percent to 90 percent over the December 1995–March 2009 period (Figure 3). These workers may be referring to the cost of employment-based coverage or coverage that they could purchase directly from an insurer. The general trend in the percentage of uninsured workers reporting cost as a reason for not having coverage has been upward.

Between December 1995 and early 1997, uninsured workers citing cost as a reason increased from about 73 percent to 84 percent, and then settled in the low-80 percent range through 1999. During 2000, an economic expansion year that saw unemployment fall to 3.9 percent, the percentage of workers reporting cost as a reason for not having coverage fell to 71.5 percent. But the percentage reporting cost as a reason for not having coverage started increasing in late 2000, continued to increase during the 2001 recession, stayed in the low-80 percent range through 2003, and then jumped to the mid-80 percent range through 2007. It dropped again to about 77 percent in mid-2008 but then rose sharply during the latest recession reaching about 87 percent by early 2009.

The percentage of workers reporting that they were not offered employment-based health benefits was roughly 40 percent through 2003, and has been falling since then, reaching 24 percent in early 2009. Currently, less than 10 percent of uninsured workers report that they do not have coverage because they are ineligible for the plan as a result of not working enough hours or declining coverage due to thinking they did not need it.
Figure 1


Figure 2

Conclusion
This analysis appears to be the first attempt to examine sources of health insurance and uninsured rates among workers on a monthly basis over a long period of time. It would also be the first time that reasons for being uninsured were examined on a monthly basis over a long period of time.

Examining these data on a monthly basis allows more accurate identification of changes in trends and can also more clearly indicate the effects of recessions and unemployment on changes in coverage. More detailed findings from these data will be published in a forthcoming EBRI Issue Brief, and these trends will be updated as the data become available.

Although the link between health insurance coverage and employment has long been known, these data underscore the degree to which employment (or, more significantly, unemployment) rates directly affect the levels of the uninsured in the United States.

Data and Methods Appendix
Data for this study come from a series of panels from the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) conducted by the Census Bureau. SIPP is a nationally representative longitudinal survey of the civilian noninstitutionalized U.S. population. SIPP provides comprehensive information about the income of individuals and households in the United States. It also provides information on participation in public programs. Individuals selected into the SIPP sample are interviewed once every four months over the life of the panel. In addition to a core set of questions asked of participants each four months, a rotating set of topical questions supplements the core questions.

Every four months, panel members were asked about health insurance coverage. Specific questions were asked about coverage from public sources, such as Medicare, Medicaid, the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), and various sources of military-related coverage. Specific questions were also asked about employment-based coverage and insurance purchased directly from an insurer. Uninsured individuals were also asked a series of questions regarding why they did not have coverage. Unfortunately, individuals with public coverage were not asked the series of questions related to why they did not have employment-based coverage; therefore, the analysis in this report related to reasons for not having employment-based coverage is limited to the uninsured.

The data in this report are for wage and salary workers ages 18–64. Self-employed workers are generally not included in the analysis because of issues regarding asking them about employer sponsorship of health benefits.

References

New Publications and Internet Sites

[Note: To order U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) publications, call (202) 512-6000.]

**Employee Benefits**

Employee Benefit Research Institute. *Fundamentals of Employee Benefit Programs*. Sixth Edition. $19.95 (EBRI members get a 55 percent discount) plus shipping. EBRI member organizations, or those interested in bulk purchases of *Fundamentals*, should contact Alicia Willis at (202) 659-0670 or e-mail: publications@ebri.org


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Profit Sharing/401k Council of America. *52nd Annual Survey of Profit Sharing and 401(k) Plans: Reflecting 2008 Plan Experience*. PSCA members, $145; nonmembers, $375. Profit Sharing/401k Council of America, 20 North Wacker Dr., Suite 3700, Chicago, IL 60606, (312) 419-1863, fax: (312) 419-1864, e-mail: psca@psca.org, www.pasca.org


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**Web Documents**

The Commonwealth Fund: *Health Insurance Premiums: Commonwealth Fund Resources:*
www.commonwealthfund.org/Content/Publications/Other/Health-Insurance-Premiums.aspx

Congressional Research Service: *Federal Employees: Pay and Pension Increases Since 1969:*

Deloitte Consulting and the International Society of Certified Employee Benefit Specialists: *2010 Top Five Total Rewards Priorities Survey:*

Hewitt Associates: *Survey Findings: Hot Topics in Retirement 2010:*


Office of the Vice President of the United States: *Annual Report of the White House Task Force on the Middle Class:*
www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/100226-annual-report-middle-class.pdf


www.prudential.com/media/managed/New_Economy_WorkPlace_Retirement.pdf


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