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Issue at a Glance – Health Care: The Uninsured

Anyone who pays even the slightest attention to the health-care debate in this country probably knows that there are “44 million uninsured Americans.” However, the source of the 44-million statistic, the Current Population Survey (CPS) is a tribute to Benjamin Disraeli’s quip that “there are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics.” Here’s why:

- Over 20% of the 44 million uninsured in this country are not citizens.
- Many people go without insurance for a few months often as the result of being between jobs, but the Survey includes them in the number of people who have been uninsured for an entire year.
- The CPS asks respondents to recall their insurance status over the last twelve months, increasing the probability of sampling error due to respondents’ memory lapses. Other surveys that question respondents more frequently report lower numbers of uninsured.
- Some respondents who receive Medicaid may say they are uninsured because of the stigma associated with the Medicaid program. Studies suggest that this may result in an undercounting of the insured by 12 to 15%.
- Over 18% of the chronically uninsured say they have gone without insurance because they have not needed it or do not believe in it.

While there are still millions who lack health insurance, we should not let inflated statistics lead us into adopting misguided health-care policies.

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For more information on this issue, read the following:

“Forty-Four Million Uninsured’ Is an Inflated Statistic”

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