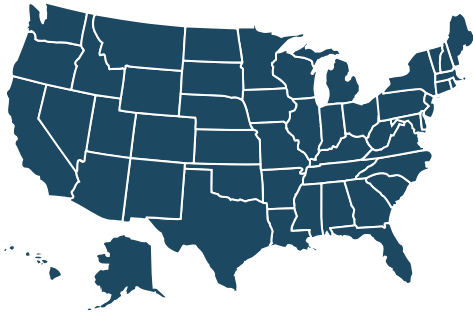


## Issue Brief

## HEALTH IN THE UNITED STATES



In 2009, one out of eight persons in the United States described their health as fair or poor.

### WHAT IS SOCIETAL DISTRESS?

Societal distress describes living conditions that do not satisfy basic human needs, such as food, shelter, health, income, and education.

Visit [www.humanneeds.vcu.edu](http://www.humanneeds.vcu.edu) for more details.

### What is health?

**Health** is defined by the World Health Organization as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” **Health distress** is measured here in terms of shorter life expectancy, premature mortality (e.g., deaths before age 65), chronic illnesses, serious psychological distress, hospitalizations, and inadequate access to health care (being uninsured, lacking a usual source of care, or having to defer care due to costs).

### How many Americans are affected?

- In 2007, 27.6% of all deaths in the United States occurred prematurely (before age 65).

As of 2009, the most current year for which statistics are available:

- 43.4% of adults age 18 or older suffered from at least one of the following six chronic diseases: diabetes, cardiovascular disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, asthma, cancer, or arthritis.
- 7.3% of the population had been hospitalized in the preceding year.
- 3.2% of adults reported serious psychological distress.
- 17.5% of the adult population under 65 (46.2 million Americans) reported being uninsured and 18.0% of adults age 18 or older reported having no usual source of health care.



**THE PROJECT ON SOCIETAL DISTRESS** is an initiative of the Virginia Commonwealth University Center on Human Needs, which examines the prevalence of societal distress in five domains—food security, housing, health, education, and income—and makes the information available to the public and policymakers. This research effort focuses on presenting accurate data on the number of Americans affected by these conditions and not examining the causes or proposing solutions. The Project on Societal Distress is funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

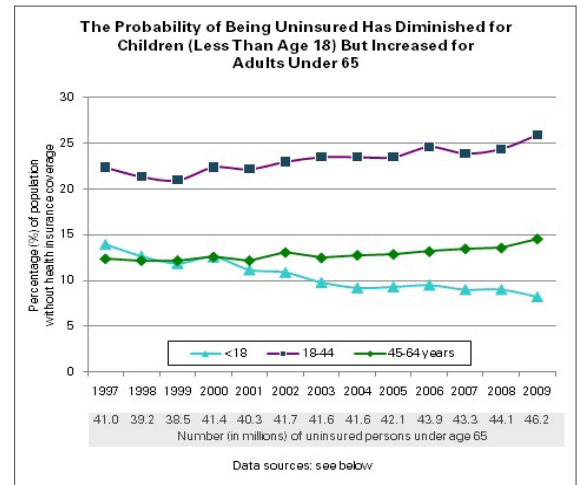
As of 2007, blacks were 1.5 times more likely than whites to die before reaching age 65.

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Poor health and complications from diseases can induce suffering, compromise quality of life, and precipitate early deaths. Illness affects educational attainment and workforce productivity, and the rising costs of health care are straining the budgets of households, employers, and government.

## What are the trends?

Since the 1990s, the proportion of the population without health insurance has decreased among children and adolescents (under age 18) but has increased among adults, especially adults under age 45.



## Who is affected?

**Children:** In 2009, more than 6 million children and adolescents, nearly one in every 12 (8.2%), were uninsured.

**Seniors:** In 2009, three out of four seniors (age 65 and older) suffered from at least one of six chronic diseases.

**Minorities:** In 2007, black infants were more than twice as likely as whites to die before their first birthday. In 2009, among adults age 18 and older, the prevalence of diabetes was 13.1% among blacks and 13.8% among Mexican Americans—more than 1.5 times the diabetes prevalence in whites.

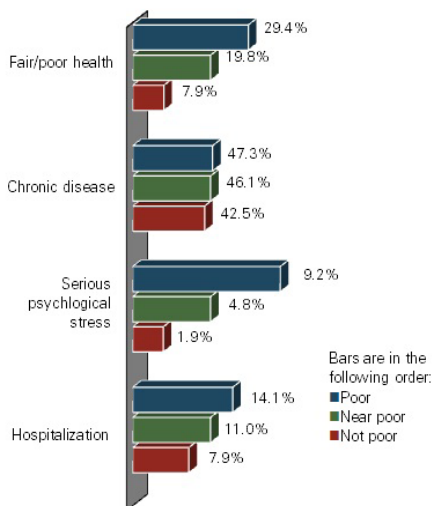
**The Poor:** In 2009, families living in poverty were 3.5 times more likely to report fair or poor health status, and 4.8 times more likely to report serious adult psychological distress, than families with incomes at least twice the poverty threshold. Nearly one-third of the poor were uninsured.

**Households with Less Education:** In 2009, adults age 25 and older with less than a high school diploma were 4.8 times as likely to report fair or poor health as were those with a bachelor's degree or higher.

## SOURCES AND METHODS

The statistics reported here were obtained from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services report, *Health, United States, 2010* and from the National Health Interview Survey (2009). The data underwent statistical analysis by the research staff of the Virginia Commonwealth University Center on Human Needs. Analytic methods are detailed at [www.humanneeds.vcu.edu](http://www.humanneeds.vcu.edu).

Health Status is Worse Among Those in Poverty (Adults Age 18 and Older, Age-Adjusted)



**THE VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY CENTER ON HUMAN NEEDS** ([www.humanneeds.vcu.edu](http://www.humanneeds.vcu.edu)) was chartered in 2007 to provide the public and policymakers with information about the prevalence of societal distress in the United States. Its mission is to document how many Americans confront food insecurity, precarious housing or homelessness, inadequate health and health care, inferior education, and inadequate income/poverty.

For more details visit [www.humanneeds.vcu.edu](http://www.humanneeds.vcu.edu).