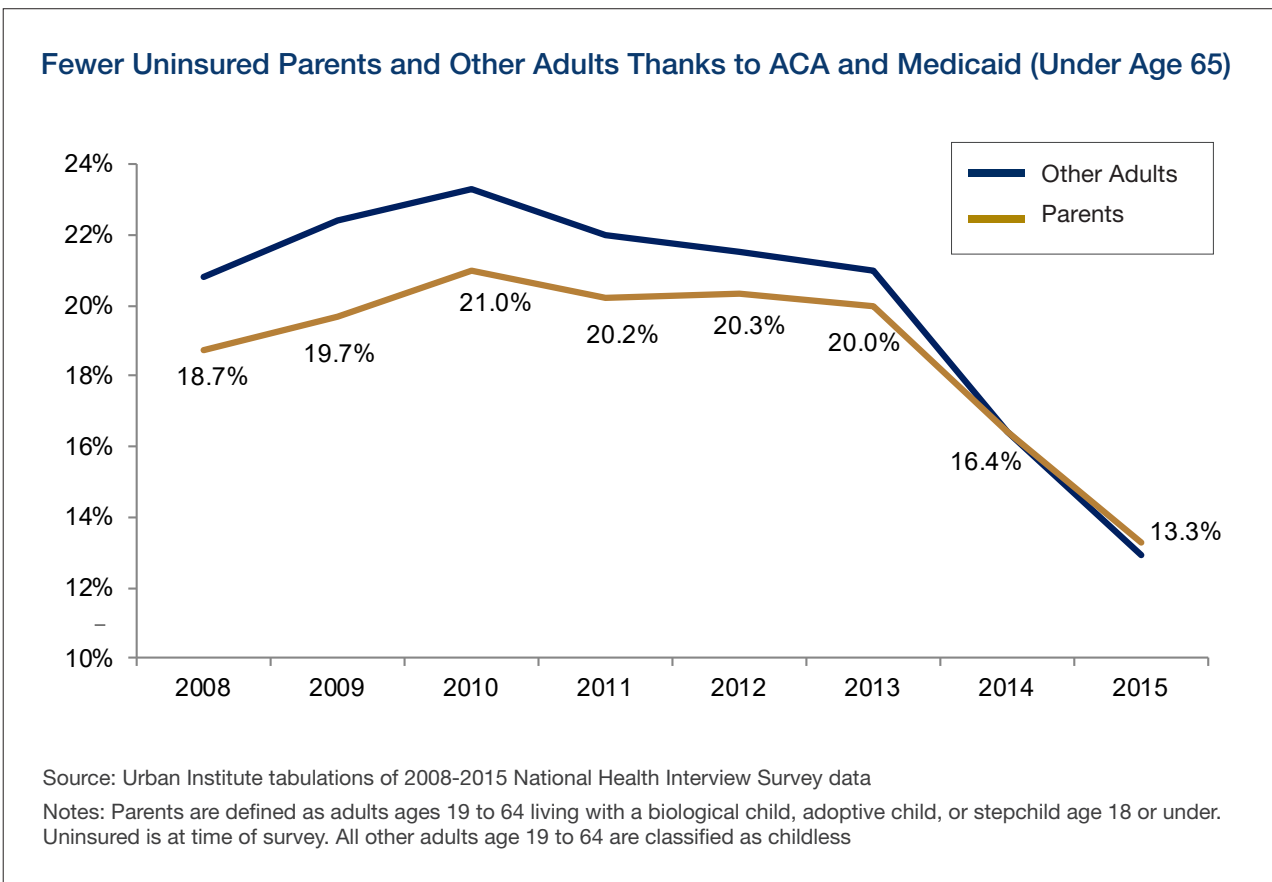




Healthy Parents and Caregivers are Essential to Children's Healthy Development

Since 2014, millions of parents and other adults have been able to access health insurance for the first time either through the Medicaid expansion (10 million) or the new marketplaces (11.5 million) created under the Affordable Care Act (ACA).¹ The rate of uninsured adults under age 65 declined significantly in 2014, the first year of full ACA implementation (See chart below). Health care coverage for adults is not only important for their own health, it influences the healthy development of young children.





Children’s relationships and interactions with adults in their lives influence their brain structure and function and, in turn, their ability to thrive.

Children’s exposure to major, frequent, and prolonged adversity in childhood—such as caregiver substance abuse or mental illness, exposure to violence, or economic hardship—can cause toxic stress, which increases the risk of poor health across the lifespan. Poor adult health associated with adverse childhood experiences cost the U.S. nearly \$100 billion annually in expenses for cardiovascular care and more than \$85 billion in mental health disorders.² Brain development science tells us that children’s resilience, ability to cope with stress and overcome adversity, and capacity to learn and thrive depend on adult-child interactions and supportive environments.³ Throughout childhood, positive relationships with parents and caregivers can mitigate the negative effects of trauma or adverse childhood experiences, including poverty. Children who are able to demonstrate resilience—or the ability to overcome adversity—have “had at least one stable and responsive relationship with a parent, caregiver, or other adult.”⁴

Positive outcomes for children rely on the overall health of their parents and caregivers.

Children face unnecessary obstacles to their own development when their parents’ health gets in the way of their ability to be the best possible caregivers. Even before

birth, access to prenatal care is critical to children’s early brain development.⁵ Maternal depression has been shown to negatively impact young children’s cognitive and social-emotional development, as well as their educational and employment opportunities later on.⁶ *More than half of poor infants have a mother who is experiencing some depressive symptoms*, yet low-income mothers of young children have high rates of untreated depression due to barriers to successful treatment - including cost of care and lack of insurance.⁷

Health coverage for parents and other adults is a necessary step toward ensuring their health and the healthy development of children they support.

While not the only necessary ingredient, health coverage gets parents and other adults better access to the health care they need to support children in their lives. Coverage can also reduce economic burden of paying for health care and provide peace of mind – both of which can reduce stress on families and positively influence children’s overall development.

Endnotes

¹ See <https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/187866/Finalenrollment2016.pdf> and http://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/114th-congress-2015-2016/reports/51385-HealthInsuranceBaseline_OneCol.pdf.

² Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (2016) in Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, “From Best Practices to Breakthrough Impacts: A Science-Based Approach to Building a More Promising Future for Young Children and Families” Harvard University, 2016, available at www.developingchild.harvard.edu. p. 4.

³ Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, “From Best Practices to Breakthrough Impacts: A Science-Based Approach to Building a More Promising Future for Young Children and Families” Harvard University, 2016, available at www.developingchild.harvard.edu.

⁴ Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, op.cit., p. 14

⁵ Ibid, p. 24

⁶ M. England et al, Depression in Parents, Parenting, and Children (2009) in A. Chester, S. Schmit, J. Alker, and O. Golden, “Medicaid Expansion Promotes Children’s Development and Family Success by Treating Maternal Depression.” Georgetown University Center for Children and Families and CLASP, July 2016, available at <http://ccf.georgetown.edu>.

⁷ A. Chester, S. Schmit, J. Alker, and O. Golden, “Medicaid Expansion Promotes Children’s Development and Family Success by Treating Maternal Depression.” Georgetown University Center for Children and Families and CLASP, July 2016, available at <http://ccf.georgetown.edu>.