

# A Profile of Tennessee's Low-Wage Uninsured Workers

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The recently enacted American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARP) includes new large financial incentives for states to extend health insurance coverage to low-wage workers and other adults earning less than \$17,775 a year.<sup>1</sup> These incentives apply to regular spending in a state's Medicaid program and offer a five-percentage point across the board increase in the federal share for a 24-month period after the state extends coverage. The Kaiser Family Foundation estimates that Tennessee's budget would see a net gain of \$900 million over a two-year period if the state expanded Medicaid.<sup>2</sup> Approximately 226,200 thousand uninsured nonelderly adults, or 38 percent of the state's uninsured adult population, would gain health insurance.<sup>3</sup>

This fact sheet examines which workers and industries would benefit from expansion of Medicaid coverage.<sup>4</sup> The top three industry sectors employing low-wage uninsured workers are hospitality, retail, and construction, accounting for 43.3 percent of those working without insurance (see Table 1). Restaurants alone employ 15 percent of low-wage uninsured workers. The most common jobs for low-wage uninsured workers in Tennessee are *cooks, cashiers, laborers/movers, and janitors* (see Table 2).



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The Georgetown University Center for Children and Families (CCF) is an independent, nonpartisan policy and research center founded in 2005 with a mission to expand and improve high-quality, affordable health coverage for America's children and families. CCF is based in the McCourt School of Public Policy's Health Policy Institute.

Table 1. Top Industry Sectors in Tennessee

For Low-Wage Workers		For Low-Wage, Uninsured Workers	
Accommodation and food services	16.3%	Accommodation and food services	17.1%
Retail	15.4%	Retail	14.8%
Health care and social assistance	13.0%	Construction	11.4%
Manufacturing	9.3%	Manufacturing	11.2%
Administrative, support, and waste management services	9.0%	Administrative, support, and waste management services	10.0%
Construction	6.3%	Health care and social assistance	8.9%
Other services (except public administration)	5.4%	Other services (except public administration)	6.0%
Transportation and warehousing	5.1%	Transportation and warehousing	3.9%
Educational services	4.5%	Educational services	2.5%
Professional, scientific, and technical services	2.3%	Professional, scientific, and technical services	1.4%

Table 2. Top Occupations in Tennessee

For Low-Wage Workers		For Low-Wage, Uninsured Workers	
Cashiers	5.5%	Cooks	6.6%
Cooks	3.9%	Cashiers	4.8%
Waiters and waitresses	3.3%	Laborers and freight, stock, and material movers, hand	3.9%
Laborers and freight, stock, and material movers, hand	3.1%	Janitors and building cleaners	3.4%
Janitors and building cleaners	3.0%	Construction laborers	3.3%
Maids and housekeeping cleaners	2.9%	Waiters and waitresses	2.9%
Retail salespersons	2.6%	Other assemblers and fabricators	2.6%
Miscellaneous production workers, including equipment operators and tenders	2.6%	Retail salespersons	2.3%
Personal care aides	2.4%	Miscellaneous production workers, including equipment operators and tenders	2.3%
Other assemblers and fabricators	2.3%	Driver/sales workers and truck drivers	2.2%

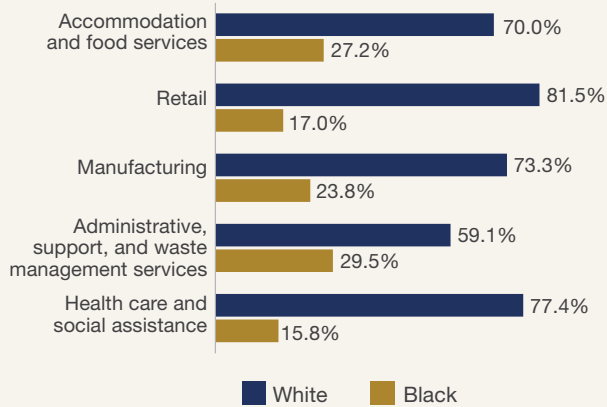
Note: Workers with no occupation are not listed.

Source: Georgetown University Center for Children and Families analysis of U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) 2019 Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS). Contact authors for more information on the methodology.

## Demographics of uninsured low-income adults

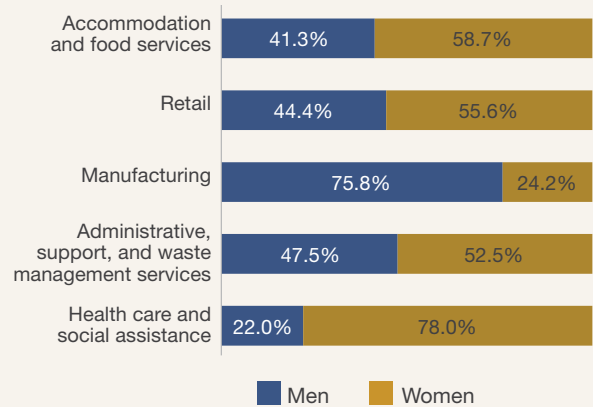
Overall, White people comprise 72 percent of low-income uninsured citizen adults and Black people comprise 25 percent. This is similar to their proportion of low-income citizen adults overall. Figure 1 shows the top industry sectors with low-wage uninsured workers by race and Figure 2 shows the top industry sectors by gender.

**Figure 1. Race of Low-Wage, Uninsured Workers in Top Industry Sectors**



Source: Georgetown University Center for Children and Families analysis of U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) 2019 Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS).<sup>5</sup>

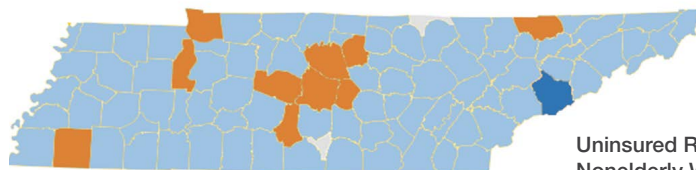
**Figure 2. Gender of Low-Wage, Uninsured Workers in Top Industry Sectors**



Source: Georgetown University Center for Children and Families analysis of U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) 2019 Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS).<sup>6</sup>

## Which parts of the state have higher proportions of uninsured workers?

The map on the right shows the range of uninsured rates for all nonelderly adult workers across the state of Tennessee by county. Sevier County has the highest rate of uninsured workers at 24 percent. Table 3 shows the 17 counties where 15 percent or more of workers are uninsured regardless of income or citizenship.



Note: Includes all workers ages 19-64 regardless of income or citizenship status.

Source: Georgetown University Center for Children and Families analysis of U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) 2015-2019 Table DP03. Contact authors for more information on the methodology.

**Uninsured Rate for Nonelderly Workers**

- Above 20%
- Between 10-20%
- Lower than 10%
- Estimate suppressed due to unreliable data

**Table 3. Tennessee Counties with 15 Percent or More of All Working Adults Uninsured**

Note: Includes all workers ages 19-64 regardless of income or citizenship status.

Source: Georgetown University Center for Children and Families analysis of U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS) 2015-2019 Table DP03. Out of Tennessee's 95 counties, two county estimates were suppressed due to high margins of error and low-reliability; this did not affect the counties presented in Table 3. Contact authors for more information on the methodology.

County	Uninsured Rate
United States	11.0%
Tennessee	12.1%
Sevier	24.1%
Van Buren	19.3%
Chester	18.4%
Grundy	18.2%
Wayne	16.6%
Warren	16.4%
Macon	16.3%
Hancock	15.9%

County	Uninsured Rate
Cumberland	15.8%
Bedford	15.7%
Crockett	15.4%
Lewis	15.4%
Loudon	15.4%
Lake	15.3%
Johnson	15.2%
Trousdale	15.1%
Meigs	15.0%

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the provisions of the law, see E. Park and S. Corlette, “American Rescue Plan Act: Health Coverage Provisions Explained” (Washington DC: Georgetown University Center for Children and Families and Center on Health Insurance Reform, March 2021), available at <https://ccf.georgetown.edu/2021/03/11/american-rescue-plan-act-health-coverage-provisions-explained/>.

<sup>2</sup> R. Rudowitz, B. Corallo, and R. Garfield, “New Incentive for States to Adopt the ACA Medicaid Expansion: Implications for State Spending” (Washington DC: Kaiser Family Foundation, March 2021), available at <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/issue-brief/new-incentive-for-states-to-adopt-the-aca-medicaid-expansion-implications-for-state-spending/>.

<sup>3</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation, “Who Could Medicaid Reach with Expansion in Tennessee?” (Washington DC: Kaiser Family Foundation, February 2021), available at <https://files.kff.org/attachment/fact-sheet-medicaid-expansion-TN>.

<sup>4</sup> All data are derived from the American Community Survey (2019). Most data come from the Public Use Microdata Sample; county data calculated from American Community Survey five-year (2015-2019) prepared tables. Contact authors for more information on sources of data and methods.

<sup>5</sup> Estimates for the share of low-wage workers in each industry sector who are American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian/Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and Two or More Races/Some Other Race are suppressed due to small sample sizes and low-reliability. Estimates for construction industry suppressed due to small sample sizes and low-reliability in all but one category. Contact authors for more information on the methodology.

<sup>6</sup> Estimates for construction industry suppressed due to small sample sizes and low-reliability in one category. Contact authors for more information on the methodology.