Adequate access to health care services, including preventive services and treatment for illnesses, is critical to achieving positive health outcomes. Two major limitations of adequate access to care are a lack of health insurance and a shortage of health care providers in certain areas.¹

Lack of Health Insurance

Lack of health insurance coverage is a significant barrier to seeking and receiving health care.²,³ Nationwide, Hispanics and young adults ages 18-24 are more likely to be uninsured than other demographic groups.¹,²

Using Texas Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) survey data, an estimated 33% of South Texas adults were uninsured during 2002-2005. South Texas had a higher percentage of uninsured residents than the rest of Texas. Both South Texas and the rest of Texas had a higher percentage of uninsured residents than the nationwide BRFSS estimate of about 16% (Figure 3.1). The estimated South Texas uninsured rate was twice as high as the national rate.

**Figure 3.1.** Estimated percent of the adult population (age 18 or older) with no health insurance by location, 2002-2005.
Source: Estimated Prevalence using the Texas Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Combined Year Dataset, Statewide BRFSS Survey, 2002-2005
In South Texas during 2002-2005, Hispanics and African-Americans had much higher percentages of uninsured individuals than did non-Hispanic whites. Hispanics had the highest uninsured rate of all race/ethnic groups; an estimated 46% of the Hispanic South Texas population had no health insurance. The percentage of Hispanics with no health care was three times as high as for non-Hispanic whites, and the percentage of uninsured African-Americans was twice as high as for non-Hispanic whites (Figure 3.2).

**Figure 3.2.** Estimated percent of the adult (age 18 or older) South Texas population with no health insurance by race/ethnicity, 2002-2005.

Source: Estimated Prevalence using the Texas Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Combined Year Dataset, Statewide BRFSS Survey, 2002-2005

It was estimated that, in 2002-2005, a little more than half of all adults ages 18-29 in South Texas had no health insurance (Figure 3.3). This youngest adult age group had the highest rate of uninsured individuals. The percentage of individuals with no health insurance dropped steadily with age (Figure 3.3).
Figure 3.3. Estimated percent of the adult (age 18 and older) South Texas population with no health insurance by age group, 2002-2005. 
Source: Estimated Prevalence using the Texas Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Combined Year Dataset, Statewide BRFSS Survey, 2002-2005

Health professional shortage areas (HPSAs)

Another major barrier to receiving adequate health care is a shortage of health care providers in certain locations. Twenty-one of the 38 South Texas counties are currently designated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as (whole county service area) primary care health professional shortage areas (HPSAs).  

The counties designated as primary care HPSAs in South Texas are shown in Figure 3.4. The HPSAs in this list are mostly non-metropolitan counties. However, a few metropolitan counties (such as Atascosa, Bandera, Medina, and Wilson) are designated as HPSAs, so a shortage of health professionals is also a problem in some South Texas metropolitan areas.  

Figure 3.4. Map of currently designated whole county primary care health professional shortage areas in South Texas.
References


