

Poll: Fewer uninsured as health law rolls out

Most improvement seen among jobless and nonwhites.

By Ricardo Alonso-Zaldívar
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. uninsured rate dropped modestly this month as expanded coverage rolled out under President Barack Obama's health care law, a major survey released Thursday showed.

The Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index found that the uninsured rate for U.S. adults dropped by 1.2 percentage points in January, to 16.1 percent. That would

translate to roughly 2 million to 3 million people gaining coverage.

The closely watched poll combines the scope and depth found in government surveys with the timeliness of media sampling. Pollsters interview 500 people a day, 350 days a year. The survey can be an early indicator of broad shifts in society. The health care results were based on more than 9,000 interviews, about nine times as many as in a standard national poll.

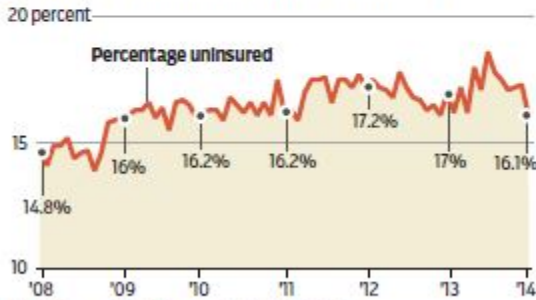
"The uninsured rate had been expected to come down as the Affordable Care Act was implemented," said Frank Newport, Gallup's editor-in-chief. "That would be the most reasonable hypothesis."

The biggest change was for unemployed people, a category that showed a drop of 6.7 percentage points. That was followed by a 2.6 percentage-point decline for nonwhites. Traditionally both groups

U.S. uninsured rate is down slightly

The U.S. uninsured rate is 16.1 percent so far in January, down from 17.3 percent in December after the Affordable Care Act's major coverage expansion took effect on Jan. 1.

Survey asked "Do you have health insurance coverage?"



NOTE: January 2014 data was collected Jan. 2-19.

Source: The Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index

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are far more likely to be uninsured than the population as a whole.

The survey found no appreciable change among young adults ages 18-34. Members of that coveted, low-cost demographic have been ambivalent about signing up for coverage so far — though their insurance purchases are considered key to defraying the cost of other provisions of the law, such as its ban on denying insurance to those with pre-existing conditions.

Women saw a decline of 1.9 percentage points, about three times greater than the 0.6 percentage-point drop for men. Uninsured rates also fell all along the income ladder, with those making \$36,000-\$89,999 seeing the greatest drop, 1.8 percentage points.

Medicaid sign-ups are also rising. That's partly because of a program expansion accepted by half the states and partly as a consequence of previously eligible but unen-

rolled people complying with the law's individual coverage mandate.

The White House called the poll good news. "It shows that the law is working," said David Simas, a senior adviser.

Nonetheless, Newport said it could take a calendar quarter — three months — to discern a full trend. Other factors could also be behind the shift, including an improving economy.

"It's a drop, but not extraordinary," said Newport. "The glass is half full for proponents of the Affordable Care Act because things are moving in the right direction. But the glass is half empty because things haven't moved much."

The office of Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell pointed out that the adult uninsured rate is about the same now as when Obama took office in 2009. It has gone as high as 18.6 percent during his term.