

WASHINGTON STATE HEALTH SERVICES RESEARCH PROJECT

Trends in County Uninsured Rates in Washington: 2013-15

Research Brief No. 81
March 2017

Wei Yen
OFM Health Care Research Center

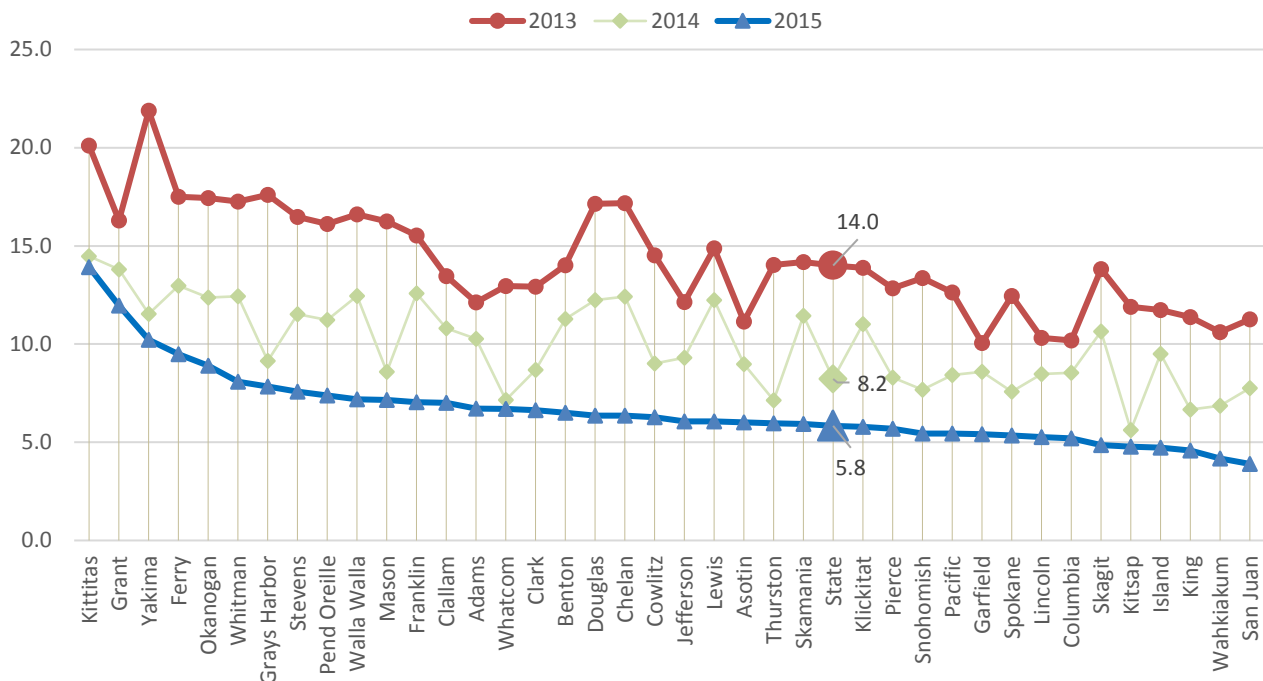
Introduction

The health coverage in Washington experienced dramatic changes in recent years as a result of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA). The state’s uninsured rate dropped from 14.0 percent in 2013, the year before the rollout of major coverage provisions of the ACA, to 8.2 percent in 2014 and to 5.8 percent in 2015, the latest year of data available.¹ This research brief presents trends of uninsured rates from 2013 to 2015 among the 39 counties in Washington.

All 39 counties experienced large declines in their uninsured rates from 2013 to 2015

As shown in the chart below, the uninsured rates in 2013 (top line) for the 39 counties ranged from approximately 10 percent to 22 percent, with the state overall uninsured rate at 14.0 percent. Two years later, in 2015, all 39 counties’ uninsured rates (bottom line) were significantly lower, with a new range of 4 percent to below 14 percent. The overall uninsured rate for the state was 5.8 percent. Note that all counties’ uninsured rates in 2015 were lower than the state overall rate of 14.0 percent in 2013. The middle line shows the counties’ uninsured rates in 2014. As the middle line is bounded by the top and bottom lines, it means that for all counties, there was a successive decline in the uninsured rates from 2013 to 2014 and to 2015.

County Uninsured Rates (%), Washington State, 2013-15 (sorted by 2015 rates)

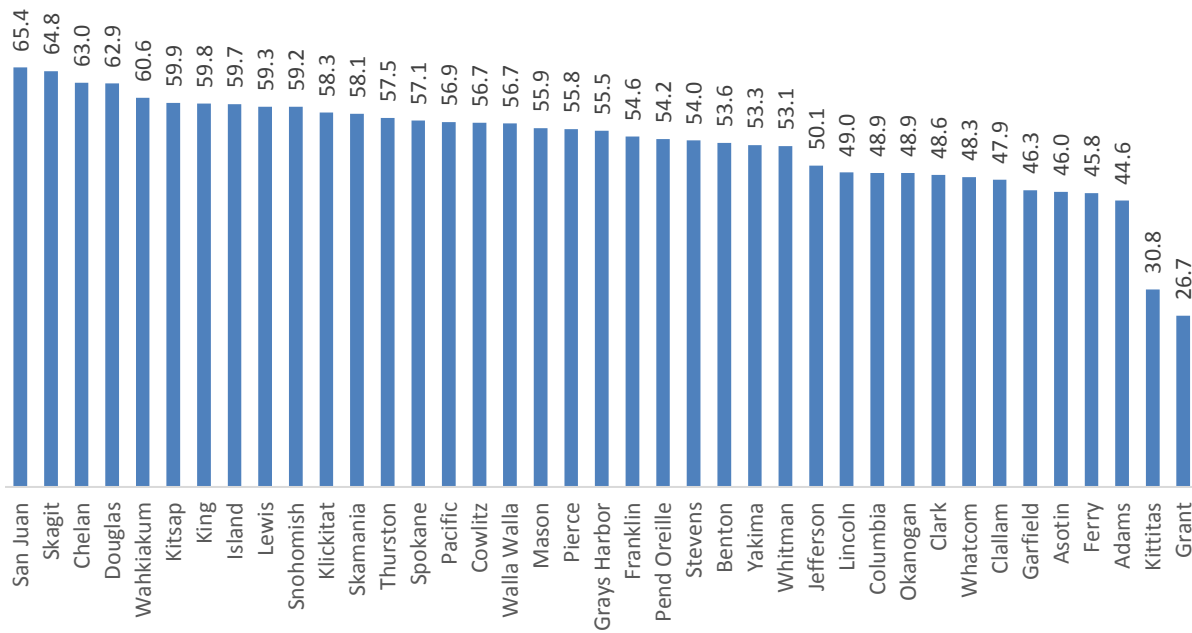


¹ Yen, W. and Mounts, T. December 2016. “Second Year Impact of ACA on Washington State’s Health Coverage.” Washington State Office of Financial Management, Research Brief No. 80.

Counties varied in their successes in reducing the uninsured

When measured as percentage of decline, the change in county uninsured rates varied considerably (see chart below). About two of every three counties (27) experienced a decline of more than 50 percent from 2013 to 2015. The percentage decline was the largest in San Juan and Skagit counties. Their uninsured rates declined by 65 percent, or two-thirds. On the lower end, Grant County and Kittitas County experienced a decline of roughly 30 percent. Though small when compared with declines in other counties, the declines of these two counties would have been considered remarkable in any two-year period prior to the ACA.

Percentage of Decline in County Uninsured Rates from 2013 to 2015
(sorted by percentage)

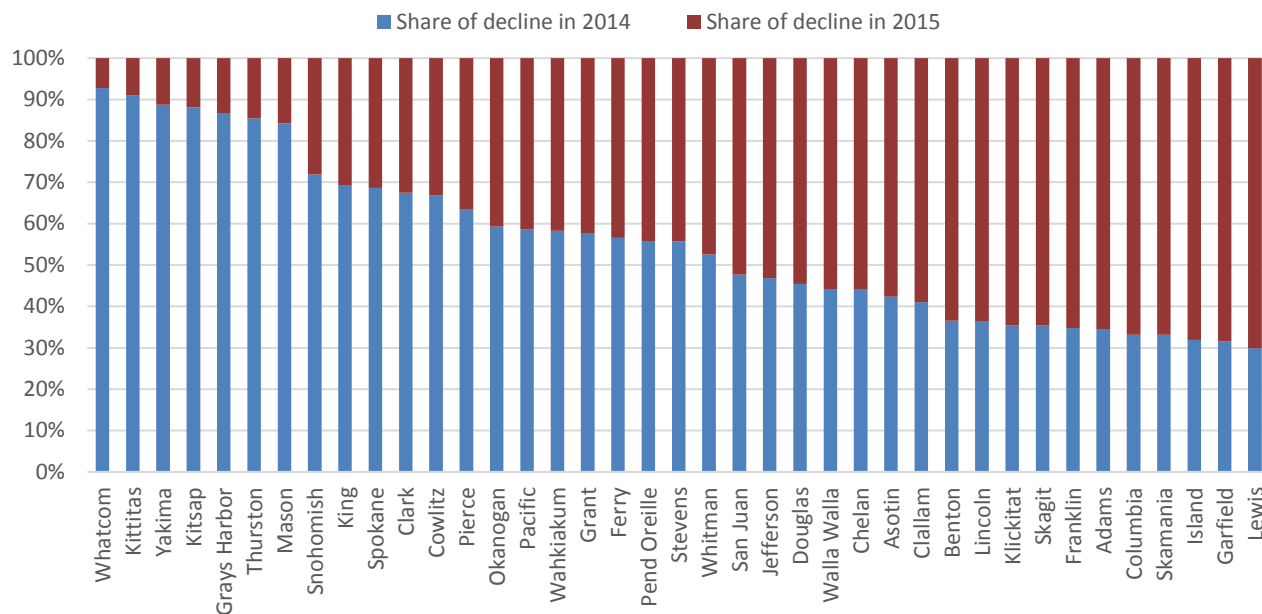


Majority of the counties achieved most of their uninsured declines in 2014

The counties also varied in when they achieved most of the decline in their uninsured rates in the two-year period following the ACA’s major rollout. More than half of the counties experienced most of their decline in 2014 and the rest had most of their decline in 2015 (see chart below). Of the 21 counties that had most of their decline in 2014, seven counties achieved more than 80 percent of their decline in that year. Whatcom County had the highest share (93 percent) of the total decline in 2014, followed by two adjacent central Washington counties, Kittitas (91 percent) and Yakima (89 percent), and four contiguous western counties: Kitsap (88 percent), Grays Harbor (87 percent), Thurston (85 percent) and Mason (84 percent). The 21 counties with most of their decline taking place in 2014 also included the five most populous counties in Washington: Clark, King, Pierce, Snohomish and Spokane.

The other 18 counties had most of their uninsured decline occurring in 2015, likely as a result of enhanced program outreach after the first year of the ACA’s major rollout. At the top of this list is Lewis County which had 70 percent of its two-year total decline occurring in 2015. Some of these 18 counties had very large total declines, including San Juan, Skagit, Chelan and Douglas counties where the uninsured rates dropped by more than 60 percent from 2013 to 2015 (see chart above).

2014 and 2015 Shares of Total County Uninsured Decline from 2013 to 2015
(sorted by 2014 shares)



Data source and notes

The original data source for this research brief is the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey 1-year Public Use Microdata Sample (ACS 1-year PUMS).² The ACS data were used in the County Population Estimation Model (CPEM)³ to produce county level estimates. The 2014 and 2015 ACS data were found to have a significant undercount of Medicaid enrollment in Washington. An adjustment was therefore applied to the 2014 and 2015 ACS data to reflect the administrative count of Washington’s Medicaid enrollment in those two years. The adjustment resulted in overall lower uninsured rates than the original ACS rates.⁴

² See <http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/data/pums.html>.

³ A statistic data model for Washington State’s county-level health coverage and poverty rates. The model resides with the Health Care Research Center at the Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM). The model produces baseline estimates and projections based on the current year’s ACS 1-year PUMS file and OFM’s population projections. The county uninsured estimates in this brief are each year’s baseline estimates of the CPEM, except for 2013. The CPEM was not generated in 2013. The county uninsured estimates for 2013 used in this brief are projection estimates for 2013 with the 2012 baseline.

⁴ For a discussion of the rationale and method for the adjustment of the undercount of Washington’s Medicaid population in the 2014 and 2015 ACS, see http://www.ofm.wa.gov/healthcare/healthcoverage/pdf/undercount_medicaid.pdf.

Appendix

County Uninsured Rates, 2013-15

County	Uninsured Rate (%)			Decline in Uninsured Rate		
	2013	2014	2015	Total Decline from 2013 to 2015 (%)	Share of Total Decline in 2014 (%)	Share of Total Decline in 2015 (%)
Adams	12.1	10.3	6.7	44.6	34.5	65.5
Asotin	11.1	9.0	6.0	46.0	42.3	57.7
Benton	14.0	11.3	6.5	53.6	36.6	63.4
Chelan	17.2	12.4	6.4	63.0	44.0	56.0
Clallam	13.5	10.8	7.0	47.9	41.0	59.0
Clark	12.9	8.7	6.6	48.6	67.4	32.6
Columbia	10.2	8.5	5.2	48.9	33.2	66.8
Cowlitz	14.5	9.0	6.3	56.7	66.8	33.2
Douglas	17.1	12.2	6.4	62.9	45.4	54.6
Ferry	17.5	13.0	9.5	45.8	56.6	43.4
Franklin	15.5	12.6	7.0	54.6	34.7	65.3
Garfield	10.1	8.6	5.4	46.3	31.5	68.5
Grant	16.3	13.8	12.0	26.7	57.5	42.5
Grays Harbor	17.6	9.1	7.8	55.5	86.6	13.4
Island	11.7	9.5	4.7	59.7	31.9	68.1
Jefferson	12.1	9.3	6.1	50.1	46.8	53.2
King	11.4	6.7	4.6	59.8	69.4	30.6
Kitsap	11.9	5.6	4.8	59.9	88.1	11.9
Kittitas	20.1	14.5	13.9	30.8	91.1	8.9
Klickitat	13.9	11.0	5.8	58.3	35.4	64.6
Lewis	14.9	12.2	6.1	59.3	29.9	70.1
Lincoln	10.3	8.5	5.3	49.0	36.3	63.7
Mason	16.2	8.6	7.2	55.9	84.2	15.8
Okanogan	17.4	12.4	8.9	48.9	59.3	40.7
Pacific	12.6	8.4	5.4	56.9	58.6	41.4
Pend Oreille	16.1	11.2	7.4	54.2	55.8	44.2
Pierce	12.8	8.3	5.7	55.8	63.4	36.6
San Juan	11.3	7.8	3.9	65.4	47.7	52.3
Skagit	13.8	10.6	4.9	64.8	35.4	64.6
Skamania	14.2	11.4	5.9	58.1	33.1	66.9
Snohomish	13.4	7.7	5.4	59.2	71.9	28.1
Spokane	12.5	7.6	5.3	57.1	68.6	31.4
Stevens	16.5	11.5	7.6	54.0	55.7	44.3
Thurston	14.0	7.1	6.0	57.5	85.4	14.6
Wahkiakum	10.6	6.9	4.2	60.6	58.2	41.8
Walla Walla	16.6	12.4	7.2	56.7	44.2	55.8
Whatcom	13.0	7.2	6.7	48.3	92.7	7.3
Whitman	17.3	12.4	8.1	53.1	52.5	47.5
Yakima	21.9	11.5	10.2	53.3	88.7	11.3
State	14.0	8.2	5.8	58.3	70.7	29.3

Source: County Population Estimation Model, Washington State Office of Financial Management
February 2017