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Estimating Eligibility and Uptake of Federally Facilitated Marketplace Insurance in North Carolina in the Second Open Enrollment Period

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BACKGROUND

As the Federally Facilitated Marketplace (FFM) enters its third open enrollment period, focus is shifting toward examining which communities have lower uptake in coverage and how to increase enrollment. In national analysis of the first open enrollment period, Holmes and colleagues found that rural areas had lower rates of plan selections.¹

KEY FINDINGS

- Overall, fewer eligible North Carolinians living in rural areas (approximately 38%) participated in the Federally Facilitated Marketplace plans compared with eligible individuals living in urban areas (44%).
- In previous analyses, we estimated ZIP code level enrollment rates in North Carolina using plan selection data from the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE). ASPE suppressed ZIP codes with fewer than 50 people selecting plans, which limits conclusions in areas with low population and/or enrollment rates (often rural).
- In North Carolina, 115 ZIP codes (an estimated 11,897 eligible persons) were suppressed due to this limitation. To assess how suppression of data affects enrollment trends, we determined if the 3,860 persons who selected a Marketplace plan from these ZIP codes lived in urban or rural areas; 57.7% resided in urban areas with the remaining 42.3% in rural areas.
- As North Carolina moves into the third open enrollment season, outreach efforts should reflect that enrollment estimates in small rural areas may be lower than reported due to data suppression. Continued outreach and education in rural communities will play an important role in increasing participation in the Federally Facilitated Marketplace during year three.

However, these estimates are potentially misleading due to data suppression in smaller, isolated areas. Nationwide, 60% of all isolated ZIP codes were suppressed for having less than 50 enrollees per ZIP code; in North Carolina, 115 of the 807 ZIP codes were suppressed. This analysis estimates health insurance eligibility and enrollment among previously suppressed areas to help inform future outreach and enrollment assistance efforts throughout the state.

RESULTS

We estimated that nearly 1.3 million residents of North Carolina were eligible to participate in the FFM during the 2015 open enrollment period. Statewide, 560,115 eligible persons selected a plan (43%). We explored how plan selection varied by geography and grouped ZIP codes by their Rural Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) classification,² a more granular measure of rurality than more common county-based measures such as metropolitan statistical areas. Table 1 shows that 44% of eligible individuals living in urban areas selected a plan, while 38% of eligible individuals living in rural areas selected a plan. Partitioning

rural areas into finer definitions, residents in large rural, small rural, and isolated areas, all had significantly lower plan selection rates (37.5%, 35.4%, and 39.2%, respectively) than urban.

Table 1: Federally Facilitated Marketplace eligibility and uptake statewide and by RUCA (ZIP code), 2015

	Eligible persons ^a	Eligible persons selecting a plan ^b	Eligible persons not selecting a plan ^c	Plan selection among eligible persons ^d
Statewide	1,297,000	560,000	736,500	43.18%
Urban	1,102,500	487,500	615,000	44.22%
Large Rural	111,500	42,000	69,500	37.54%
Small Rural	49,000	17,500	31,500	35.40%
Isolated	34,000	13,500	20,500	39.15%

^aNumber of eligible persons, rounded to nearest 500

^bNumber of eligible persons selecting a plan, rounded to nearest 500

^cNumber of eligible persons not selecting a plan, rounded to nearest 500

^dRate of plan selection among eligible persons, nonrounded

We then explored how aggregate estimates on the county level varied by geography (see Table 2). Among the ten counties (10%) with the lowest plan selection rates, only two (Gates and Yadkin) are classified as metropolitan by the federal government.³ These ten counties represent 60,277 eligible persons (4% of the state) and had median enrollment of 25%. In contrast, among the ten counties with the highest enrollment rates, five (Wake, Forsyth, Guilford, Mecklenburg, and Union) are all metropolitan counties. These counties represent 379,982 eligible persons (29% of the state) and had a median enrollment of 56%. Nonmetropolitan counties are displayed in blue.

Table 2: Federally Facilitated Marketplace eligibility and plan selection by county in North Carolina, 2015

County	Eligible	Enrolled	Gap	Selection Rate	County	Eligible	Enrolled	Gap	Selection Rate
Alamance	20,500	7,000	13,500	35%	Johnston	29,000	8,500	20,000	30%
Alexander	5,000	2,000	3,000	40%	Jones	2,000	500	1,500	29%
Alleghany	1,500	1,000	1,000	49%	Lee	8,000	2,500	5,500	32%
Anson	4,000	1,500	2,500	32%	Lenoir	10,000	2,500	7,500	24%
Ashe	4,000	2,000	2,000	49%	Lincoln	10,500	4,500	6,500	40%
Avery	2,500	1,500	1,000	61%	Macon	5,000	2,500	2,000	54%
Beaufort	7,500	3,000	4,000	44%	Madison	3,000	1,500	1,500	46%
Bertie	4,500	1,000	3,500	22%	Martin	5,500	1,500	4,000	27%
Bladen	7,500	2,000	5,500	25%	McDowell	7,500	2,000	5,000	30%
Brunswick	17,000	7,500	9,500	44%	Mecklenburg	122,000	69,500	52,500	57%
Buncombe	45,000	21,500	23,500	47%	Mitchell	2,000	1,000	1,000	51%
Burke	14,500	4,500	10,000	30%	Montgomery	3,500	1,000	2,500	34%
Cabarrus	22,500	11,000	11,500	49%	Moore	10,500	5,000	5,500	47%
Caldwell	12,500	4,500	8,000	35%	Nash	13,000	4,500	8,000	36%
Camden	1,500	500	1,000	27%	New Hanover	32,500	16,000	16,500	49%
Carteret	10,500	5,000	5,500	45%	Northampton	2,500	1,000	2,000	31%
Caswell	3,000	1,000	2,000	36%	Onslow	18,000	6,000	12,000	33%
Catawba	20,000	9,000	11,000	45%	Orange	17,000	7,000	10,000	42%
Chatham	8,500	4,000	5,000	43%	Pamlico	2,000	1,000	1,000	41%
Cherokee	4,000	1,500	2,500	40%	Pasquotank	5,500	1,500	4,000	26%
Chowan	2,000	500	1,500	31%	Pender	9,000	3,500	6,000	37%
Clay	1,500	500	500	49%	Perquimans	2,000	500	1,500	29%

Table 2 continued: Federally Facilitated Marketplace eligibility and plan selection by county in North Carolina, 2015

County	Eligible	Enrolled	Gap	Selection Rate	County	Eligible	Enrolled	Gap	Selection Rate
Cleveland	12,000	4,500	7,500	38%	Person	5,500	2,000	3,500	37%
Columbus	13,500	3,000	10,500	22%	Pitt	26,000	8,500	17,500	32%
Craven	12,500	4,500	8,000	37%	Polk	2,500	1,500	1,000	52%
Cumberland	34,500	13,000	21,000	38%	Randolph	17,000	8,000	9,000	47%
Currituck	3,500	1,500	2,000	38%	Richmond	5,500	2,000	3,500	36%
Dare	8,500	4,000	4,500	46%	Robeson	13,000	10,000	3,500	75%
Davidson	21,500	8,500	13,000	40%	Rockingham	11,500	5,000	6,500	45%
Davie	8,000	2,000	5,500	28%	Rowan	21,500	8,000	13,500	36%
Duplin	7,000	2,500	4,000	39%	Rutherford	9,500	3,500	6,000	39%
Durham	32,500	15,000	17,500	47%	Sampson	7,500	3,000	4,500	41%
Edgecombe	8,000	2,500	5,500	32%	Scotland	4,000	1,500	2,500	37%
Forsyth	35,500	19,500	15,500	56%	Stanly	8,000	3,000	5,000	39%
Franklin	8,000	3,500	4,500	45%	Stokes	6,000	2,500	3,000	44%
Gaston	29,500	10,000	19,500	35%	Surry	11,000	4,000	7,000	35%
Gates	2,000	500	1,500	21%	Swain	2,500	1,000	1,500	33%
Chatham	8,500	4,000	5,000	43%	Pamlico	2,000	1,000	1,000	41%
Graham	1,500	500	1,000	36%	Transylvania	5,500	2,500	3,500	42%
Granville	7,500	2,500	5,000	36%	Tyrrell	1,000	500	500	39%
Greene	3,000	1,000	2,000	34%	Union	23,000	13,500	9,500	58%
Guilford	57,500	32,000	25,500	56%	Vance	6,500	2,500	4,000	36%
Halifax	7,000	2,500	4,500	34%	Wake	117,000	57,500	59,500	49%
Harnett	15,500	5,500	10,500	34%	Warren	3,000	1,000	2,000	35%
Haywood	9,000	3,500	5,500	39%	Washington	3,000	1,000	2,000	27%
Henderson	18,000	6,500	11,500	35%	Watauga	7,500	3,500	4,000	44%
Hertford	2,500	1,000	2,000	32%	Wayne	15,000	4,500	10,500	30%
Hoke	5,000	2,000	3,000	41%	Wilkes	11,000	4,000	7,500	35%
Hyde	1,000	500	500	39%	Wilson	12,000	4,000	8,000	33%
Iredell	23,500	11,000	12,000	48%	Yadkin	7,500	2,000	5,500	25%
Jackson	5,500	1,500	4,000	30%	Yancey	2,500	1,000	1,500	46%

Eligible: Number of eligible persons within county, rounded to nearest 500

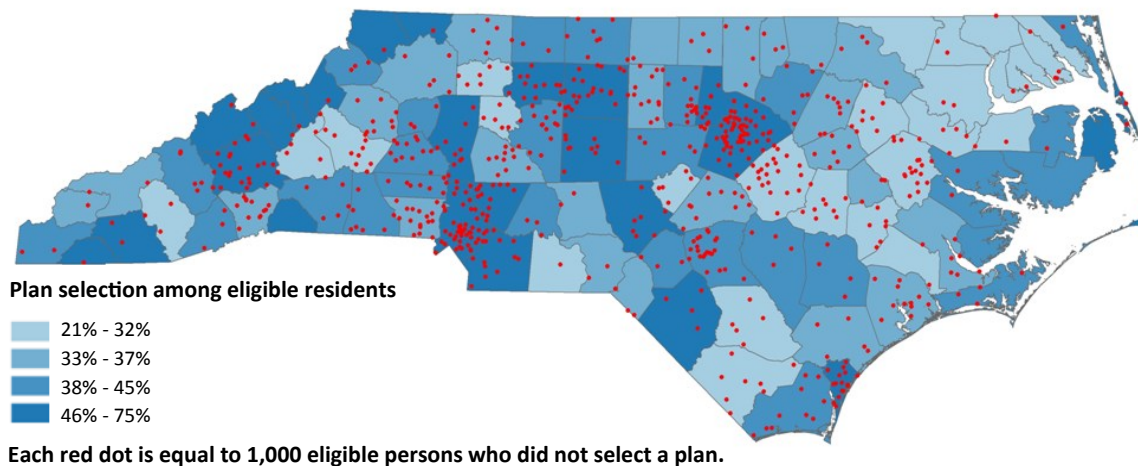
Enrolled: Number of eligible persons selecting a plan within county, rounded to nearest 500

Gap: Number of eligible persons not selecting a plan within county, rounded to nearest 500

Selection Rate: Rate of plan selection among eligible persons within county, nonrounded

Figure 1 shows the rate of plan selection among eligible residents by county where the darker shading indicates higher rates. There are higher rates of enrollment in the Charlotte and Triangle metro areas but also rural areas in the West along with Robeson County. More rural areas in eastern North Carolina had lower enrollment rates. Overlaid are dots that represent persons that were eligible to enroll but did not (referred to as the gap between eligibility and enrollment). That is, each red dot represents 1,000 persons who are potentially eligible but did not enroll. Although the urban areas had higher enrollment rates, they still contain the bulk of the eligible but not enrolled individuals (615,000). The map also shows thousands of eligible people in rural areas that did not enroll (121,500).

Figure 1: Federally facilitated insurance plan selection rates & density of eligible persons not selecting a plan, 2015



DISCUSSION

As previous studies have found, enrollment in the Federally Facilitated Marketplace has great variation across the urban-rural spectrum. Lower rates of plan selection among eligible residents in rural areas in North Carolina suggest the need for additional and possibly more targeted educational and outreach efforts in rural areas of North Carolina. Moving forward outreach to potential enrollees in rural regions should be strengthened to ensure all potential beneficiaries have the opportunity to gain needed coverage.

METHODS

This study builds off the work of Holmes and colleagues from October 2014¹ in which plan selection data from ASPE was merged with the Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) from the American Community Survey (ACS) to determine the proportion of eligible individuals selecting a FFM insurance plan within ZIP codes.⁴ For a full description on the data and foundational methods, see ASPE, and Holmes and colleagues.^{4,1} ASPE data are based upon residence at time of plan selection and is available for the 36 states currently participating in the FFM.⁴ In previous analyses, Holmes et al estimated ZIP code level enrollment rates in North Carolina using plan selection data from the ASPE. ASPE suppressed ZIP codes with fewer than 50 people selecting plans, which limits conclusions in areas with low population and/or enrollment rates (often rural). In this revised approach, rather than dropping ZIP codes with fewer than 50 people selecting a FFM plan, an iterative approach estimated the number of potentially eligible residents and plan selections. The modeled numbers estimated could not exceed 49 as the ASPE suppression only applied to areas with fewer than 50 people selecting a plan. In North Carolina, 115 ZIP codes (an estimated 11,897 eligible persons) were suppressed due to this limitation. To assess how suppression of data affects enrollment trends, we determined if the 3,860 persons who selected a Marketplace plan from these ZIP codes lived in urban or rural areas; 57.7% resided in urban areas with the remaining 42.3% in rural areas. Similar to previous work, this study relies on estimates of eligible individuals that may differ from actual numbers.¹ Likewise, ASPE only releases data on plan selection, not enrollment *per se*. To the extent that effectuation varies by rurality type, the plan selection rates may differ from enrollment.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

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