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ISSUE BRIEF

NUMBER OF YOUNG ADULTS GAINING INSURANCE DUE TO THE AFFORDABLE CARE ACT NOW TOPS 3 MILLION

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New survey findings released today by the National Center for Health Statistics show that the extension of dependent health coverage up to age 26 continues to lead to greater rates of insurance coverage among young adults.¹ This policy is one part of the Affordable Care Act, and it took effect for insurance plan renewals beginning on September 23, 2010. The new estimates show that from September 2010 to December 2011, the percentage of adults 19 to 25 with insurance coverage increased from 64.4% to 74.8%, which translates into over 3 million additional young adults with coverage.² This continues the steady increase in coverage for this age group since the Affordable Care Act went into effect (Figure 1),³ and follows a new report from the Commonwealth Fund using independent survey data to show that coverage has expanded significantly for this age group in the past two years.⁴

The results from the 2011 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) released today provide additional details about the coverage gains under the Affordable Care Act:

- The increased coverage among young adults occurred specifically among those who benefit from the new law: individuals between the ages of 19 and 25. For comparison, insurance coverage among adults 26 to 35 was not significantly affected (from 72.3% in Q3 2010 to 71.8% by the end of 2011).

¹ Cohen RA, Martinez ME. Health insurance coverage: Early release of estimates from the National Health Interview Survey, 2011. National Center for Health Statistics. 2012. (Accessed at <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhis/earlyrelease/Insur201206.pdf>)

² There are 29.7 million adults in this age group, as of the most recent Census data (see Footnote 6). There was a 10.4% increase in insured young adults (64.4% to 74.8%) from Q3 2010 to Q4 2011 (Table 8). 10.4% of 29.7 million is 3.1 million young adults. The increase in insurance coverage for Q4 2011 represented a statistically significant change from Q1-Q3 2011 (74.8% versus 71.3%).

³ Sommers BD, Schwartz, K. “2.5 million young adults gain health insurance due to the Affordable Care Act.” Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, Department of Health and Human Services, 2011. (Accessed at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/health/reports/2011/youngadultsaca/ib.shtml>).

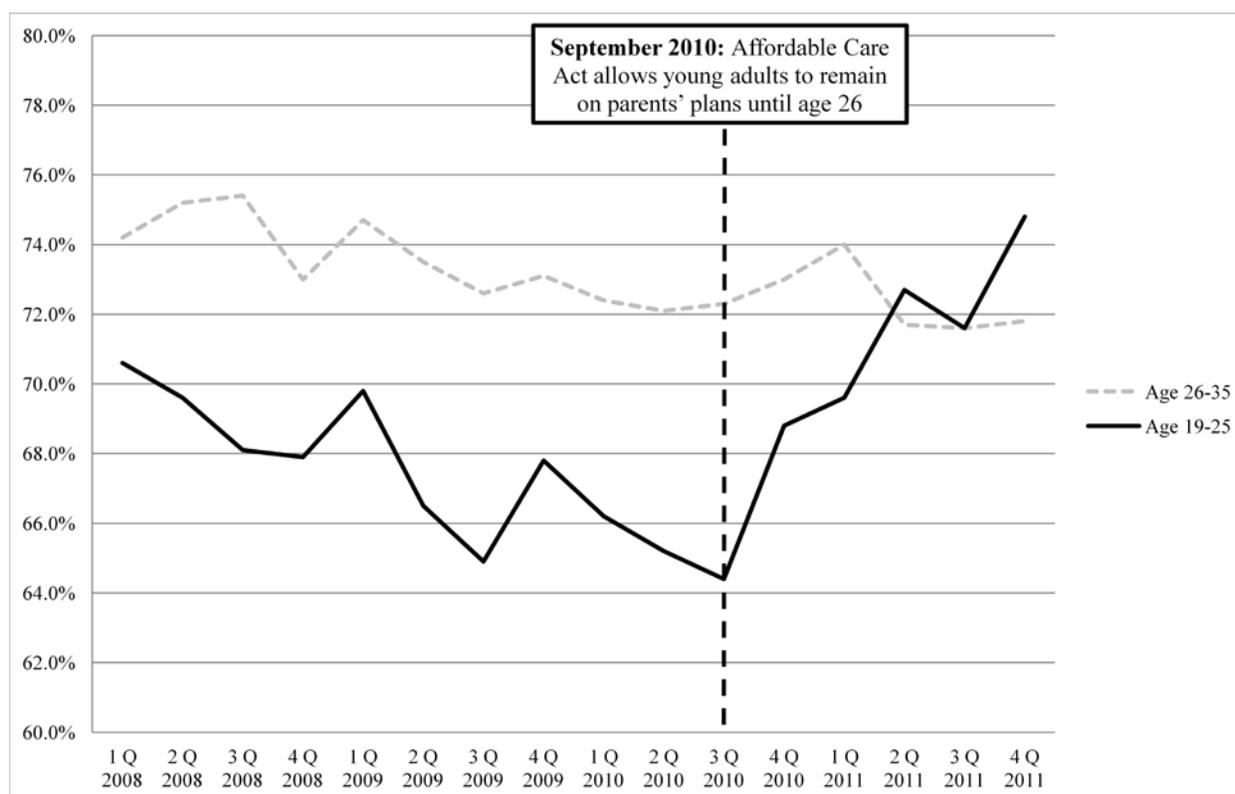
⁴ A recent survey from the Commonwealth Fund found that 6.6 million young adults who have enrolled in their parents' health plans since November 2010 were unlikely to have been eligible for those plans before the Affordable Care Act. This number exceeds our calculation because it includes some individuals who were already insured, often through their own private coverage. Other recent research (Sommers & Kronick, 2012 – see Footnote 5) suggests that just under 60% of the increased coverage of young adults on their parents' plans came from individuals switching from their own private plans; multiplying the remaining 40% by Commonwealth's estimate of 6.6 million indicates 2.6 million young adults gaining coverage, which is within range of our 3 million estimate from NHIS data. Collins SR, Robertson R, Garber T, Doty MM. “Young, uninsured, and in debt: Why Young Adults Lack Health Insurance and how the Affordable Care Act is Helping – Findings from the Commonwealth Fund Health Insurance Tracking Survey.” Commonwealth Fund, 2012. (Accessed at: <http://www.commonwealthfund.org/Publications/Issue-Briefs/2012/Jun/Young-Adults-2012.aspx>)

- The gains for young adults were almost entirely from increased private insurance (a 9.5 percentage point increase, from 49.3% to 58.8%) with no statistically significant change in public coverage. This is consistent with previous published research from other sources.⁵
- Gains in coverage were particularly large for young men, whose rate of coverage increased from 57.9% to 72.0% during this time period. Before this policy took effect, young men ages 19 to 25 had the highest rates of being without insurance of any particular gender-age group combination. Coverage among young women also increased during this period, from 71.2% to 77.5%.

The NHIS data and Commonwealth survey are consistent with trends in other earlier sources that showed an increase in the percentage of young adults 19 to 25 with health insurance coverage since 2010.^{6,7} Today's results show that the initial gains from this policy have continued to grow as more plan renewals took effect and the public's awareness about this coverage option has increased.

Figure 1

**Percentage of Young Adults With Health Insurance,
2009-2011 by Quarter & Age Group**



Source: Cohen RA, Martinez ME. Health insurance coverage: Early release of estimates from the National Health Interview Survey, 2011. National Center for Health Statistics. June 2012. (Accessed at <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhis/earlyrelease/Insur201206.pdf>)

⁵ Sommers BD, Kronick R. "The Affordable Care Act and Insurance coverage for Young Adults." *JAMA*. 307(9): 913-914.

⁶ DeNavas-Walt C, Proctor BD, Smith JC. Census Bureau. Current Population Reports, P60-239, Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2010, Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 2011.

⁷ Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index. In U.S., Significantly Fewer 18- to 25-year-olds Uninsured. 21 September 2011. (Accessed at: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/149558/Significantly-Fewer-Year-Olds-Uninsured.aspx>)