

## **Issue Brief: African Americans & Social Welfare**

### **Keywords:**

African Americans, Social Welfare, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Assistance for Needy Families (SNAP), Unemployment benefits programs, Social Security, Medicaid

### **Description:**

This issue brief details the evolving relationship between African Americans and social welfare programs in the United States. It discusses differing African American participation with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), unemployment benefits programs, Social Security program, and Medicaid.

### **Key Points:**

- African American participation in TANF, SNAP, and unemployment benefits programs has decreased in the past decade, while the participation of other minority groups has increased.
- Although non-Hispanic whites are the largest share of SNAP recipients, stereotypes about black reliance on food assistance programs persist.
- African Americans disproportionately rely on and benefit from the U.S. Social Security program.
- The Affordable Health Care Act has had an impact on black populations living in states with expanded Medicaid programs, but 1.4 million African Americans are still caught in a “coverage gap.”

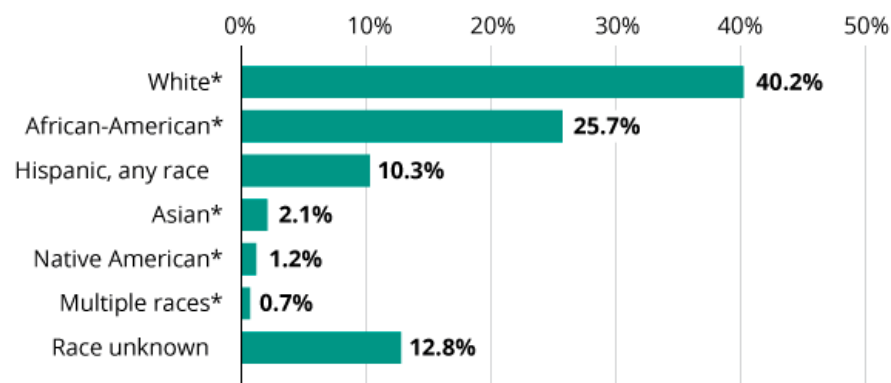
### **Issue Brief:**

Among the largest and most impactful social welfare programs in the United States are the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), unemployment benefits programs, Social Security, and Medicaid. According to a U.S. Census Bureau report released in 2015, 21.3% of the US population participated in government assisted programs each month in 2012. The African American population had the highest participation rate in social welfare programs of any demographic at 41.6%, followed by Hispanics at 36.4% and Asians or Pacific Islanders at 17.8%. Although African Americans consistently engage with these programs at greater levels, the population’s relationship with each program is distinct and evolving.

The decreasing African American participation rates in TANF, SNAP, and unemployment benefits programs do not mirror the trends of other minority groups or the non-Hispanic white population. The percentage of African American TANF families has decreased from 38.6% in 2000 to 31.9% in 2010, while the proportion of TANF Hispanic families has increased since 2004. Whites follow a less consistent pattern, with the peak of TANF participation occurring in 2006 at 33.4%. The black population also has relatively lower rates of engagement with the SNAP program with a 25.7% rate compared to the largest demographic, the white population, at 40.2%. Despite the reality of white dominance in what was formerly known as the food stamp program, the stereotype around African Americans being the most common recipients of welfare checks still persists in political life. Moreover, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the African American unemployment rate has decreased from 10.7% in January 2015 to 8.8% in January 2016, which suggests that less African Americans are eligible for unemployment benefits.

### A Large Share Of SNAP Recipients Are White

Participating households by race and ethnicity of the household head, 2013



\*Not Hispanic

**Note:** Seven percent of households had no household head and no adult listed on the file.

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture

THE HUFFINGTON POST

Figure A: The Disparity between Black and White SNAP Recipients

On the other hand, the U.S. Social Security program is an especially critical social welfare program for African American citizenry, who are 13% of the population but 17% of all Social Security disability recipients. African Americans have a lower life expectancy at age 65 and a higher rate of becoming disabled than the white population, so Social Security serves the necessary function of providing financial support to their children, who constitute 19% of all children receiving social security. Moreover, the black population consists of a higher percentage of low-wage workers than the white population. The median salary of a working-age, full-time African American was approximately \$36,000, compared to the median of \$43,000 for all working-age people. Due to the progressive nature of the Social Security system and the lower average earnings potential for African Americans, this population ultimately receives more benefits in relation to past earnings than high-wage workers.

### Blacks Use Survivor and Disability Benefits More than Whites

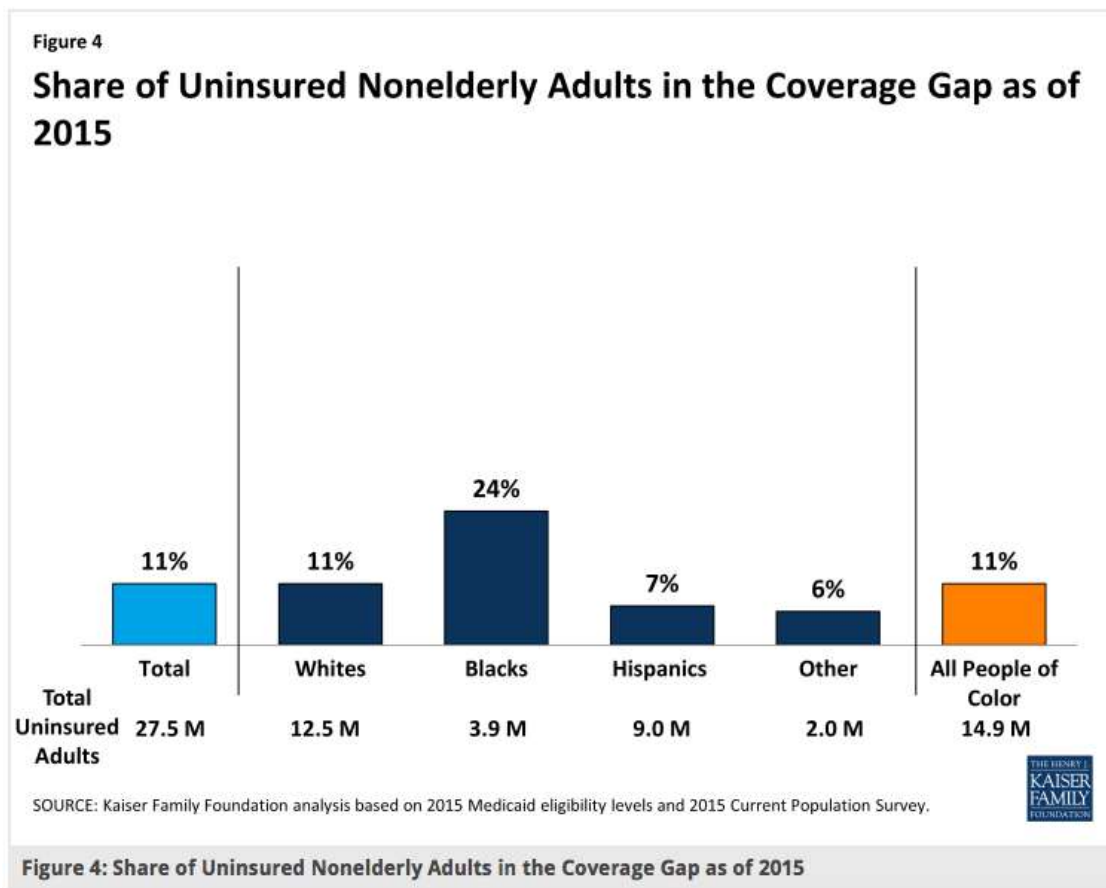


Source: Social Security Administration, *Annual Statistical Supplement 2009*, Table 5.A1.

*Figure B: African Americans use Social Security benefits more than Whites*

Additionally, although the Affordable Care Act has also had a tremendous impact on whites' access to healthcare, it has not benefited the African American population to the same extent. 55% of all African Americans live in the 23 states that have not expanded Medicaid. As a point of comparison, 42% of whites, 38% of Latinos, and 23% of Asians do not have access to

Medicaid because they live in non-expansion states. Furthermore, 1.4 million African Americans are caught in a “coverage gap” because their salary is too high to qualify for Medicaid but not sufficient to earn subsidized insurance on federal healthcare packages. Thus, more than one-fourth of the 4 million Americans in the coverage gap are black. Regardless, the ACA has had some impact for black Americans living in expansion states, and the percentage point gap between blacks and whites has dropped from 6.5 to 5. Yet, it is evident that the 2012 Supreme Court ruling to make Medicaid expansion optional has restricted the consequences of the act for Black Americans—a group that has historically depended heavily on Medicaid as a major source of health coverage.



*Figure C: Total percentage of Uninsured African Americans*

Roma Patel

Therefore, social welfare initiatives have had mixed results in aiding this population: while it is evident that programs such as the Social Security system have been beneficial for African Americans, legislation like the ACA have had limited effects. The social welfare landscape of the United States continues to be dynamic. The decline in black engagement with several of these programs has coincided a growing reliance by other minority groups.

#### Works Cited

"21.3% of US Participates in Government Assistance Programs Each Month." *21.3% of US Participates in Government Assistance Programs Each Month*. United States Census Bureau, 28 May 2015. Web. 11 Apr. 2016. <<https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2015/cb15-97.html>>.

"African Americans and Social Security." NAACP. Web. <[action.naacp.org](http://action.naacp.org)>.

Delaney, Arthur. "Who Gets Food Stamps? White People, Mostly." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com. Web. 11 Apr. 2016. <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/28/food-stamp-demographics\\_n\\_6771938.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/28/food-stamp-demographics_n_6771938.html)>.

The Impact of the Coverage Gap for Adults in States Not Expanding Medicaid by Race And Ethnicity." *The Impact of the Coverage Gap for Adults in States Not Expanding Medicaid by Race and Ethnicity*. Kaiser Family. Web. 11 Apr. 2016. <<http://kff.org/disparities-policy/issue-brief/the-impact-of-the-coverage-gap-in-states-not-expanding-medicaid-by-race-and-ethnicity/>>

Wiltz, Teresa. "Many African-Americans Fall Into a Health 'Coverage Gap'" *The Pew Charitable Trusts*. Web. <<http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and->

Roma Patel

analysis/blogs/stateline/2015/1/26/many-african-americans-fall-into-a-health--coverage-gap>.

#### General References

2015, March. *PROFILE OF SNAP HOUSEHOLDS*. United States Department of Agriculture.

Web. <<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/ops/Maine.pdf>>.

"Employment Status of the Civilian Population by Race, Sex, and Age." *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Web. 11 Apr. 2016.

<<http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t02.htm>>.

Khimm, Suzy. "How Obamacare Reduces Racial Disparities in Health Care." *Msnbc.com*. NBC News Digital, 16 Dec. 2014. Web. 11 Apr. 2016. <<http://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/how-obamacare-reduces-racial-disparities-health-care-study>>.

Morin, Rich. "The Politics and Demographics of Food Stamp Recipients." *Pew Research Center*. Web. <<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/07/12/the-politics-and-demographics-of-food-stamp-recipients/>>.