

# Having a Primary Care Provider in West Virginia

## West Virginia Social Survey Report

WVSS-20-05

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### Background

Primary care providers are vital for a strong healthcare system, health equity, and positive health outcomes.<sup>1</sup> Primary care is defined as “family medicine services typically provided by physicians to individual patients and is person-oriented, longitudinal care.”<sup>1</sup> It is designed to be the first point of a contact for individuals and families when seeking healthcare and attempts to bring healthcare “as close as possible to where people live and work.”<sup>1</sup> Many studies have documented that stronger primary care systems are associated with better health outcomes as is receiving primary care.<sup>1,2</sup> Yet, having a primary care provider is not universal. In 2015, only 75% of adult Americans identified a source of primary care provision.

In West Virginia, those with low income, those who have never been married, and those between the ages of 30 and 39 have the lowest rates of having a primary care provider. Certain counties in West Virginia also have very low rates.

### Highlights

- 86% of West Virginian’s report having a primary care provider.
- In West Virginia, married individuals and those who are widowed have higher rates of having a primary care provider than those who are divorced or have never been married.
- West Virginians whose annual household income is less than \$10,000 have the lowest rates of having a primary care provider of any income category.
- West Virginians who report not accessing medical care due to the cost in the last 12 months have lower rates of having a primary care provider.
- Some West Virginia counties have low rates of having a primary care provider.

## Primary Care Provider Rates

Respondents were asked: “Do you have a dedicated medical provider (doctor, doctor's assistant, or nurse practitioner), sometimes called a primary care provider?”

Eighty-six percent of respondents said yes. This compares to 75% of respondents in a 2015 US survey who identified a source of primary care.<sup>1</sup> In the US, there are regional differences in having a primary care provider, with 80% of the Midwest and 71% of the South having source of primary care.<sup>1</sup>

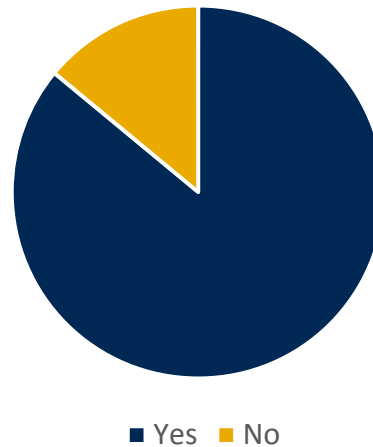
## Marital Status and Primary Care Provider

Approximately 95% of widowed and 90% of married West Virginians identified having a primary care provider. Whereas roughly 82% of divorced and 74% of never married respondents indicated that they have a primary care provider. These patterns mirror those for the US population except that West Virginians have higher levels of having a primary care provider across all marital statuses. In the US population, 91% of widowed, 80% of married, 77% of divorced, and 62% of never married have primary care.<sup>2</sup>

## Income and Primary Care Provider

West Virginians with less than \$10,000 in annual household income have the lowest rates

Figure 1. "Do you have a dedicated medical provider (doctor, doctor's assistant, or nurse practitioner), sometimes called a primary care provider?"



of having a primary care provider of any income category (68%). Those with incomes between \$10,000 and 100,000 have rates of having a primary care provider between 85 and 90 percent. Those with reported annual household incomes between \$100,001-150,000 have the highest rates of having a primary care provider at roughly 94%. Yet

only 80% of West Virginians in the highest income category--\$150,001 and above—report having a primary care provider.

## Age and Primary Care Provider

West Virginians between the ages of 30 and 39 have the lowest rates of having a primary care provider (roughly 74%). Approximately 80% of West Virginians between the

Figure 2. Percent with Primary Care Provider by Marital Status

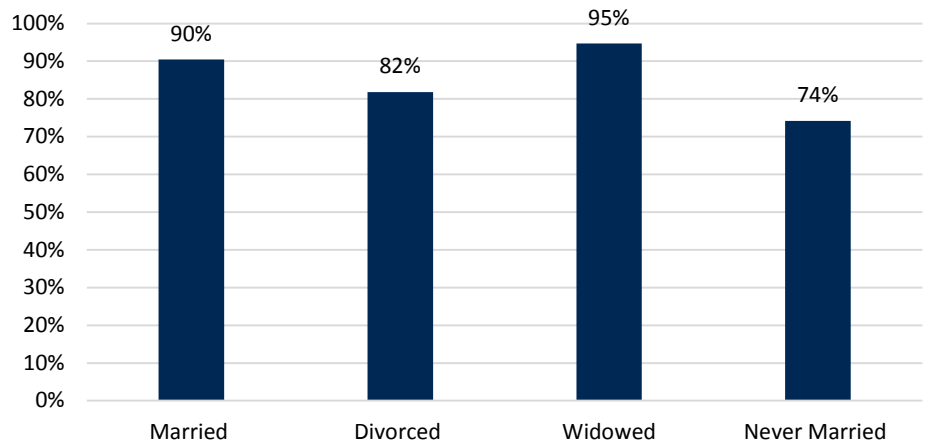
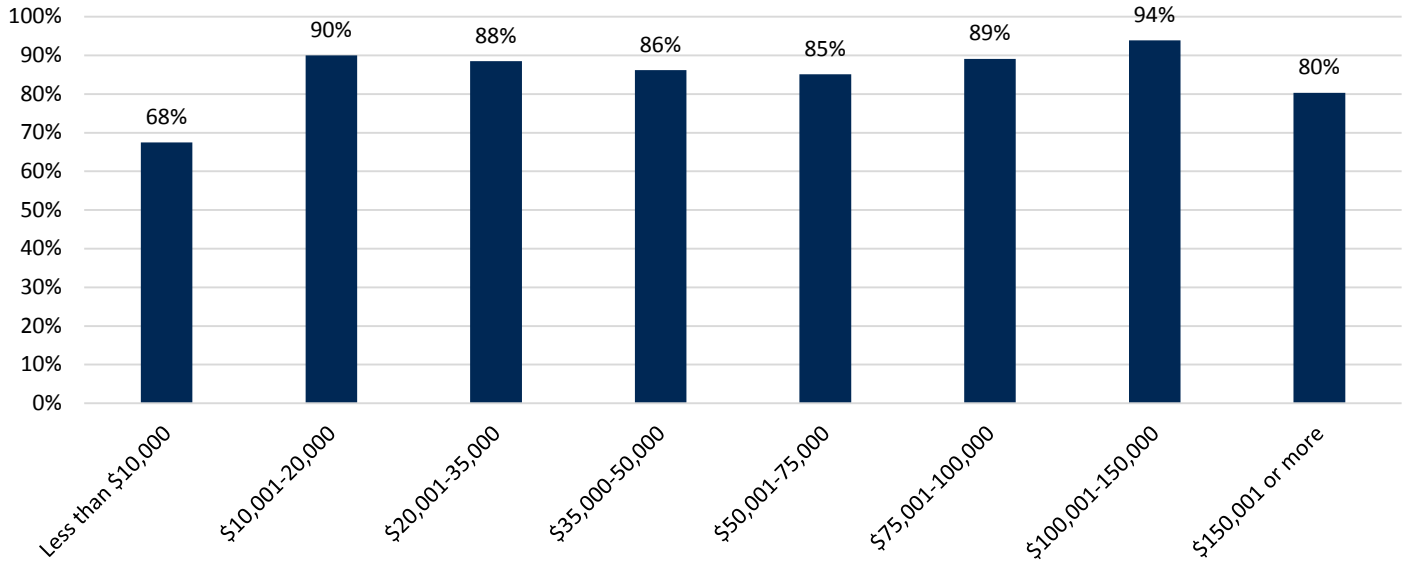


Figure 3 - Percent with Primary Care Provider by Income



ages of 18 and 29 and 40 and 49 have a primary care provider. Older West Virginians have the highest rates of having a primary care provider over 90% of those 60 and older identify having a primary care provider. This is distinct from the US population in which those in their 20s have the lowest rates of having a

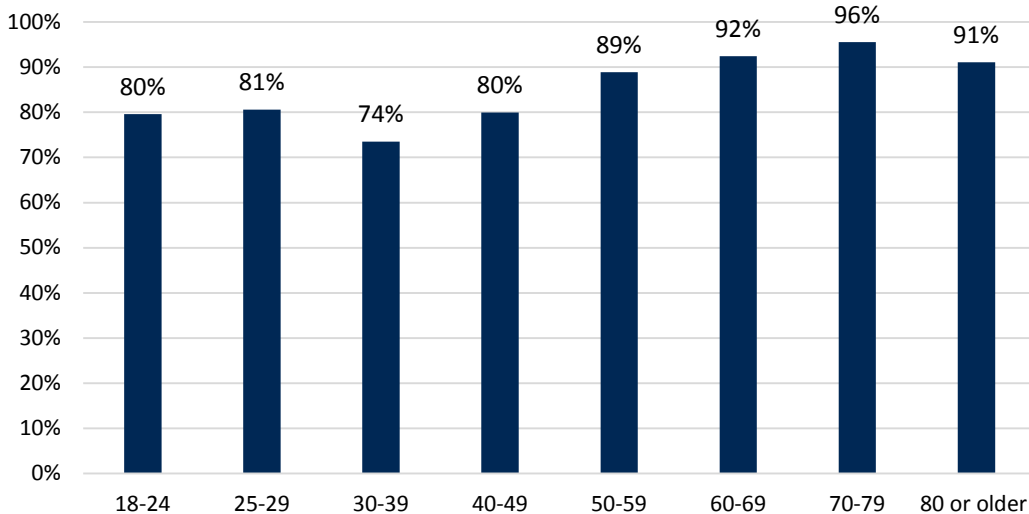
primary care provider (64%).<sup>2</sup> In fact, rates of having a primary care provider increase with age among the US population.<sup>2</sup>

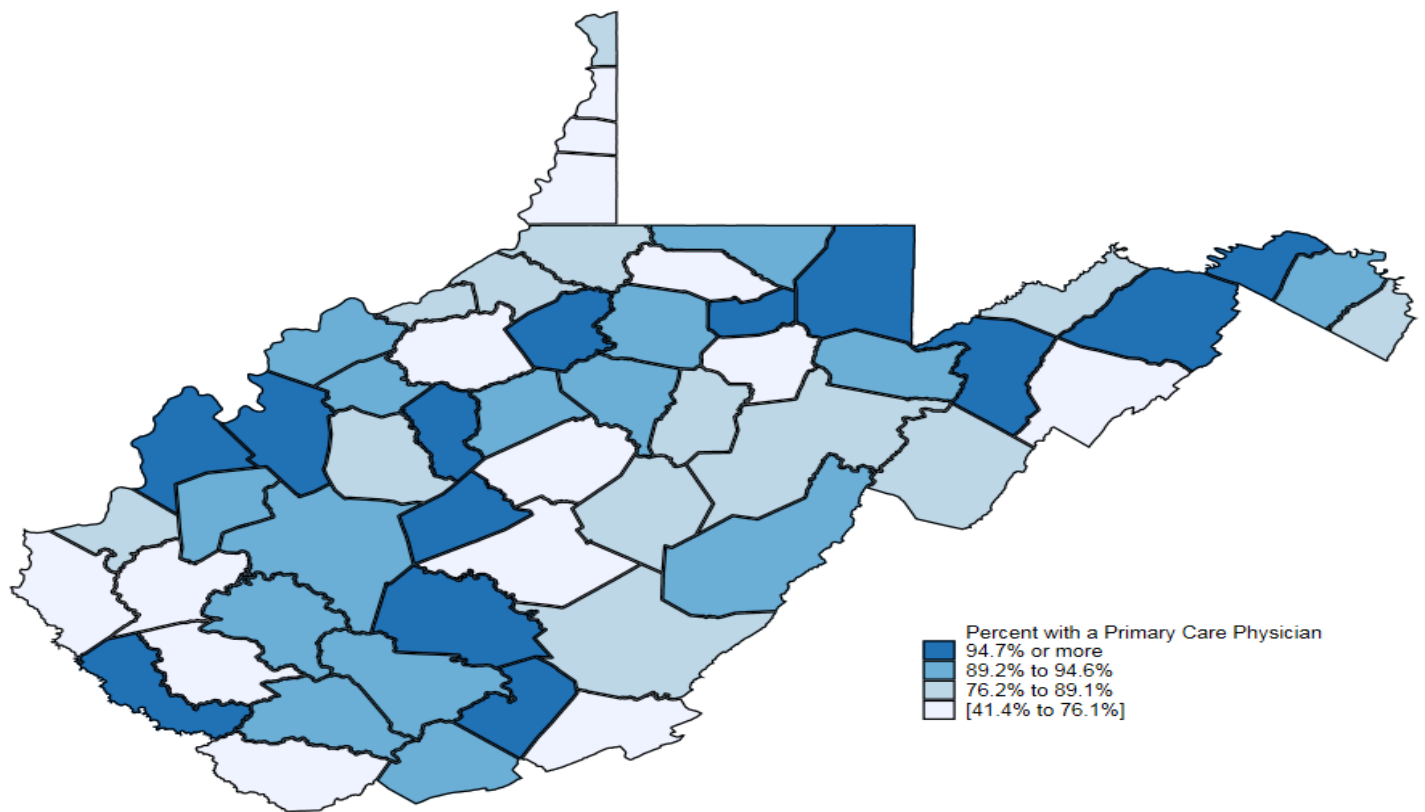
**Financial Cost of Medical Care and Primary Care Provider**

The West Virginia Social Survey also asked respondents “During the past 12 months, was there

any time when you needed medical care but DID NOT GET IT because of the cost?” Roughly 73% of those who responded yes to this question, indicated that they have a primary care provider, compared to 88% percent of those who responded no.

Figure 4 - Percent with Primary Care Provider by Age





### West Virginia Counties and Primary Care Provider

While most counties in West Virginia have rates of having a primary care provider that fluctuate around the average for the state, there are several counties that have very low rates. Brooke (48%), Hardy (61%), Lincoln (60%), Marshall (56%), Monroe (62%), and Ritchie (41%).

### Summary

West Virginians report higher rates of having a primary care provider than the US population (86% compared to 75%).<sup>2</sup> However, having a primary care provider rates vary by certain socio-demographic factors. West Virginians who are married or

widowed and those who are older have higher rates of having a primary care provider. Those with annual household incomes less than \$10,000, those who report needing medical care but didn't accessing it due to cost, and those who live in certain West Virginian counties report lower rates of having a primary care provider. Given the health benefits of having a primary care provider, it is important for researchers to examine why some West Virginian counties have such low rates of having a primary care provider.

### Citations

<sup>1</sup> Shu, Leiyu. 2012. "The Impact of Primary Care." *Scientifica* 2012: 1-22.

<sup>2</sup> Levine, David M., Jeffrey A. Linder, and Bruce E. Landon. 2020. "Characteristics of Americans with Primary Care and Changes Over Time, 2002-2015." *JAMA Internal Medicine* 180(3): 463-466.

### Data Source

The WVSS is produced by the Survey Research Center at West Virginia University. The purpose of the WVSS is to gather information on the attitudes, concerns, and challenges facing WV residents.

The WVSS is a mail survey utilizing an address-based sample of nearly 5,000 households across the state.

The 2020 WVSS received nearly 1,900 responses for a response rate of 38.1% (American

Association of Public Opinion Research Definition #3). Data are weighted to be representative of the West Virginia adult population.

### **Suggested Citation**

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