

THE IMPACT OF TENNCARE

A Survey of Recipients, 2023

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THE IMPACT OF TENNCARE: A SURVEY OF RECIPIENTS, 2023	2
METHOD	2
TABLE 1: Head of Household Age and Household Income.....	3
ESTIMATES FOR INSURANCE STATUS	4
TABLE 2: Statewide Estimates of Uninsured Populations (2003–2023).....	4
TABLE 2a: Uninsured Tennesseans by Age (2010–2023).....	4
FIGURE 1: Statewide Rate of Uninsured Populations (2010-2023).....	5
REASONS FOR FAILURE TO OBTAIN MEDICAL INSURANCE	5
TABLE 3: Reasons for Not Having Insurance (2003–2023) (Percent).....	6
TABLE 4: “Cannot Afford” Major Reason for No Insurance: By Income (2017–2023) (Percent).....	6
EVALUATIONS OF MEDICAL CARE AND INSURANCE COVERAGE	7
TABLE 5: Quality of Medical Care Received by Heads of Households (2014–2023) (Percent).....	7
TABLE 6: Quality of Medical Care Received by Children of Heads of Households (2014–2023) (Percent).....	8
OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH THE TENNCARE PROGRAM	8
TABLE 7: Percent Indicating Satisfaction with TennCare (2011–2023) (Percent).....	8
BEHAVIOR RELEVANT TO MEDICAL CARE	9
TABLE 8: Heads of Households: Medical Facilities Used When Medical Care Initially Sought (2014-2023) (Percent).....	9
TABLE 9: Children: Medical Facilities Used When Medical Care Initially Sought (2014-2023) (Percent).....	9
TABLE 10: Frequency of Visits to Doctor for Heads of Households (2014–2023) (Percent).....	10
TABLE 11: Frequency of Visits to Doctor for Children (2014–2023) (Percent).....	10
EASE OF OBTAINING A DOCTOR’S APPOINTMENT FOR TENNCARE FAMILIES	11
TABLE 12: Time between Attempt to Make Appointment and First Availability of Appointment: TennCare Heads of Households (2014–2023) (Percent).....	11
TABLE 13: Wait for Appointments: TennCare Heads of Households (2014–2023) (Minutes).....	11
TENNCARE PLANS	12
TABLE 14: Reported TennCare Plan (2018–2023) (Percent).....	12
FIGURE 2: Reported TennCare Plan (2023).....	12
TABLE 15: Households Receiving TennCare Information from Plans (2014–2023) (Percent).....	13
TABLE 16: Best Way to Get Information about TennCare (2014–2023) (Percent).....	13
FIGURE 3: Number of Times Sought Non-Emergency Care at a Non-Participating Provider in Past 12 Months (Percent).....	14
TABLE 17: Type of Non-Emergency Care Sought from a Non-TennCare Provider (2022-2023) (Percent).....	14
FIGURE 4: Type of Non-Emergency Care Sought from a Non-TennCare Provider (2023).....	15
TABLE 18: Reasons Sought Non-Emergency Care from a Non-TennCare Provider (2023) (Percent of TennCare Recipients).....	15
CONCLUSION	16

The Impact of TennCare: A Survey of Recipients, 2023

Method

The Boyd Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Tennessee, under contract with the Department of Finance and Administration of the State of Tennessee, conducted a survey of Tennessee residents to ascertain their insurance status and use of medical facilities and their level of satisfaction with the TennCare program. A sample size of 5,000 households allows us to obtain accurate estimates for subpopulations. The Boyd Center prepared the survey instrument in cooperation with personnel from the Division of TennCare.

The University of Tennessee Social Work Office of Research and Public Service (SWORPS) and Wilkins Research Services conducted the survey by randomly selecting potential respondents from a land line and cell phone set of numbers and contacting those families between May and July 2023. TennCare provided SWORPS with 10,000 (de-identified) phone numbers to help reach TennCare households. We also enhanced the telephone lists by using a larger web panel compared to the web panel used in previous years.¹

Up to five calls were made to each residence, at staggered times, to minimize non-response bias. The design chosen was a “Household Sample,” and the interview was conducted with the head of the household. When Spanish-speaking households without an available English speaker were reached, a person fluent in Spanish would call the household at a later time to conduct the survey. Approximately 21.8 percent of those who answered their land line phone or cell phone were willing to participate in the survey.² The large sample size allowed for the weighting of responses by income and age to provide unbiased estimates for the entire population. For all statewide estimates, a correction factor was used to adjust for the degree to which the sample over- or under-represented Tennesseans grouped by household income and head of household age.³ (Table 1).

This is a follow-up to previous surveys of around 5,000 Tennessee households conducted annually since 1993, the last year of Medicaid before Tennessee adopted TennCare. Throughout this report, we make comparisons to findings from earlier surveys.

¹ Beginning in 2017, SWORPS supplemented random dialing with a web panel of respondents. Prior to the survey, these web respondents provided some basic information such as age and income and were contacted to balance the distribution of responses across age and income combinations.

² In the land line phone sample, there were 2,783 completed surveys, 7,588 refusals, and 487 who did not qualify. In the cell phone sample, there were 723 completed surveys, 2,521 refusals, and 222 who did not qualify. There were 1,506 surveys completed by web panel participants. Our final sample included 5,012 responses. An individual will not qualify to participate if he/she is not a head of household, not a Tennessee resident or is under the age of 18.

³ Starting with the 2016 report, the 5-year American Community Survey (ACS) conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau is used to adjust the sample by household income and head of household age. The ACS is a nationwide survey designed to provide reliable and timely estimates of the demographic, social, economic and housing characteristics of the U.S. population and for parts of the U.S., such as states.

TABLE 1: Head of Household Age and Household Income

Age-Head of Household	Proportion in 2023 Survey (Percent)	Proportion in ACS* (Percent)	Deviation (Percent)
Under 25	8.5	3.9	-4.6
25-44	37.4	32.1	-5.3
45-64	36.0	37.5	1.5
65+	18.1	26.5	8.4
Household Income Level	Proportion in 2023 Survey (Percent)	Proportion in ACS* (Percent)	Deviation (Percent)
Less than \$10,000	5.8	6.2	0.4
\$10,000 to \$14,999	9.9	4.7	-5.2
\$15,000 to \$19,999	6.8	4.6	-2.2
\$20,000 to \$29,999	10.0	9.3	-0.7
\$30,000 to \$39,999	11.0	9.5	-1.5
\$40,000 to \$49,999	9.8	8.8	-1.0
\$50,000 to \$59,999	8.8	8.0	-0.8
\$60,000 to \$99,999	15.9	23.0	7.1
\$100,000 to \$149,999	13.1	14.3	1.2
\$150,000 and over	8.9	11.6	2.7

*Census Bureau, 2018-2021 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates for Tennessee.

Estimates for Insurance Status

Estimates for the number of Tennesseans who are uninsured are presented below. These statewide estimates are extrapolated from the weighted sample. The estimated population of uninsured persons represents approximately 7.7 percent of the 7,051,339 Tennessee residents, a slight increase from the 2022 estimate of 7.5 percent. (Table 2 and Figure 1).⁴ The percent of uninsured adults increased from 9.0 percent in 2022 to 9.1 percent in 2023. The uninsured rate for children in 2023 is 2.5 percent (up from 2.3 percent in 2022), and the estimated number of uninsured children is 39,001 (Table 2a).

TABLE 2: Statewide Estimates of Uninsured Populations (2003–2023)

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
State Total	371,724	387,975	482,353	649,479	608,234	566,633	616,967
Percent	6.4	6.6	8.1	10.7	10.0	9.3	10.0

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
State Total	618,445	604,222	577,813	611,368	472,008	426,301	364,732
Percent	9.9	9.5	9.2	9.6	7.2	6.6	5.5

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
State Total	400,691	486,661	468,096	566,523	564,452	522,097	541,900
Percent	6.0	6.7	6.9	8.3	8.3	7.5	7.7

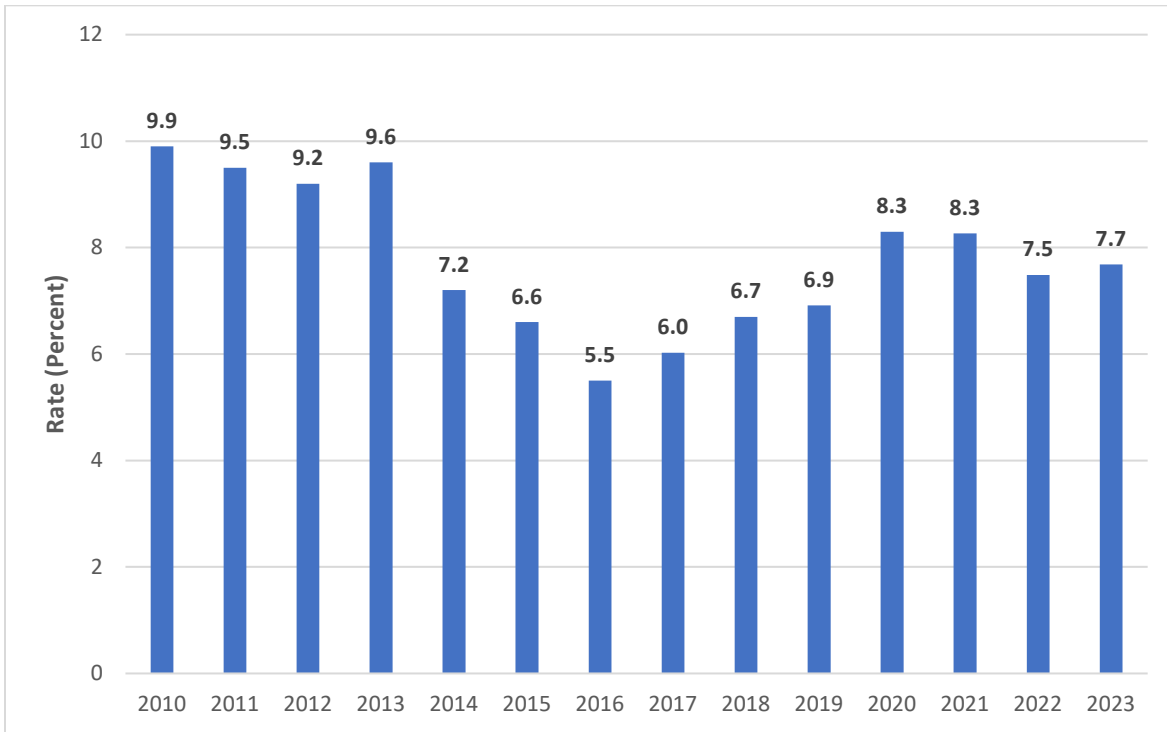
TABLE 2a: Uninsured Tennesseans by Age (2010–2023)

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Under 18 Total	57,912	35,743	40,700	55,319	36,104	21,959	27,226
Under 18 Percent	3.9	2.4	2.7	3.7	2.4	1.5	1.8
18+ Total	560,532	568,479	537,113	556,049	435,904	404,342	337,506
18+ Percent	12.0	12.0	11.2	11.4	8.7	8.2	6.6

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Under 18 Total	22,009	34,458	42,749	42,090	37,354	35,436	39,001
Under 18 Percent	1.5	2.3	2.8	2.8	2.5	2.3	2.5
18+ Total	378,682	417,170	425,347	524,433	527,098	486,661	502,899
18+ Percent	7.4	8.0	8.1	9.9	9.9	9.0	9.1

⁴ Population estimates are found using U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimates. In prior years (1993 to 2008), population figures were gathered from the “Interim State Population Projections,” also prepared by the U.S. Census Bureau.

FIGURE 1: Statewide Rate of Uninsured Populations (2010-2023)



Reasons for Failure to Obtain Medical Insurance

Affordability remains the top-cited reason for failing to obtain health insurance. Seventy-eight percent of uninsured respondents cited “cannot afford” as a major reason and 7 percent cited affordability as a minor reason (Table 3). We report the distribution of responses who cited affordability as a major reason by income bracket in Table 4. The share of households with income of \$40,000 or more had the largest change, increasing from 66 percent in 2022 to 71 percent in 2023.

TABLE 3: Reasons for Not Having Insurance (2003–2023) (Percent)

Year	Cannot Afford			Did Not Get to It			Do Not Need		
	Major Reason	Minor Reason	Not a Reason	Major Reason	Minor Reason	Not a Reason	Major Reason	Minor Reason	Not a Reason
2003	82	8	10	10	20	70	8	15	77
2004	82	7	11	8	19	73	8	16	76
2005	82	7	10	9	16	75	8	15	77
2006	87	4	9	12	14	74	12	14	74
2007	89	6	4	9	11	79	5	13	82
2008	93	4	4	7	11	82	5	8	87
2009	92	3	4	3	15	81	5	10	85
2010	91	5	4	5	13	82	6	15	80
2011	88	5	7	11	12	77	8	12	79
2012	88	5	7	9	13	78	7	13	80
2013	83	6	11	9	17	74	5	16	79
2014	86	6	8	11	15	75	12	14	74
2015	83	7	10	9	13	77	9	10	80
2016	80	5	16	16	10	73	17	13	70
2017	78	9	13	11	15	74	13	13	74
2018	82	8	11	8	14	78	10	12	78
2019	81	8	11	11	15	74	13	12	75
2020	81	10	9	9	22	68	10	23	67
2021	80	6	14	12	22	66	11	18	71
2022	82	6	12	15	20	65	14	17	70
2023	78	7	15	14	22	64	15	21	64

TABLE 4: “Cannot Afford” Major Reason for No Insurance: By Income (2017–2023) (Percent) ⁵

Household Income	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Less than \$20,000	80	81	80	76	78	77	75
\$20,000 - \$39,999	75	80	81	84	79	80	76
\$40,000 and above	42	77	68	79	78	66	71

⁵ Results in Table 4 omit respondents who did not report household income.

Evaluations of Medical Care and Insurance Coverage

Tennessee residents’ perceptions about the quality of care received have remained consistently high for the last decade. Since 2014, the share of all heads of households who rated quality of care received as “good” or “excellent” has ranged from 77 percent to 80 percent and was 77 percent in 2023. Since 2014, the share of TennCare heads of households who rated their quality of care as “good” or “excellent” has ranged from 70 percent to 77 percent and was 77 percent in 2023 (Table 5).

TABLE 5: Quality of Medical Care Received by Heads of Households (2014–2023) (Percent)

All Heads of Households	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Excellent	31	32	33	33	32	33	33	34	30	30
Good	47	46	45	45	45	47	46	45	46	47
Fair	16	17	17	17	17	15	16	15	18	17
Poor	6	5	5	5	6	5	6	6	6	6
Heads of Households w/ TennCare	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Excellent	25	28	31	27	26	30	30	30	27	32
Good	45	42	43	46	45	46	44	43	46	45
Fair	22	24	23	22	24	19	20	20	22	18
Poor	8	5	3	5	5	5	6	7	5	5

In 2023, all heads of households and heads of households with TennCare children reported similar levels of satisfaction with the quality of healthcare received by covered children. In 2023, 86 percent of all households and households with TennCare children reported quality of care received as “excellent” or “good.” Forty-four percent of households with TennCare children reported quality of care as “excellent” versus 39 percent of all households with children. These responses are consistent with long-term trends, indicating respondents remain satisfied with the quality of care received by their children (Table 6).

TABLE 6: Quality of Medical Care Received by Children of Heads of Households (2014–2023) (Percent)

All Heads of Households	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Excellent	41	45	46	43	44	45	45	44	40	39
Good	48	44	42	45	45	44	44	44	45	47
Fair	9	8	10	10	9	8	9	10	13	12
Poor	2	3	2	2	2	3	3	2	2	2
Heads of Households w/ TennCare⁶	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Excellent	38	41	43	39	43	45	41	44	40	44
Good	49	46	44	48	45	42	43	41	43	42
Fair	10	9	12	11	10	11	13	12	15	12
Poor	3	4	1	3	2	3	3	3	2	2

Overall Satisfaction with the TennCare Program

TennCare recipients continue to show high levels of satisfaction with the TennCare program as a whole (Table 7). Specifically, 95 percent of respondents indicated they are “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied” with the TennCare program in 2023, and rates have consistently exceeded 90 percent over time.⁷ In addition, 98 percent are “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied” with the TennCare program for their children (untabulated).

TABLE 7: Percent Indicating Satisfaction with TennCare (2011–2023) (Percent)

2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
95	93	95	93	95	92	95	95	94	94	92	95	95

⁶ This subgroup includes all households in which at least one child is enrolled in TennCare, even if the head of the household is not enrolled.

⁷ A three-point scale was used, and respondents could indicate “very satisfied,” “somewhat satisfied,” or “not satisfied.” We ask a related question about satisfaction with TennCare coverage, and 93 percent report that they are “satisfied.”

Behavior Relevant to Medical Care

Each respondent was asked a series of questions regarding his or her behavior when initially seeking medical care (Table 8). Reported behavior for 2023 is very consistent with recent surveys. Ninety-two percent of all heads of households first sought care at a doctor's office or clinic, while 90 percent of TennCare heads of households did the same. In 2023, 96 percent of all households with children and 95 percent of TennCare households with children first sought care at a doctor's office or clinic (Table 9). The 2023 results are similar to the amounts reported in 2022.

TABLE 8: Heads of Households: Medical Facilities Used When Medical Care Initially Sought (2014-2023) (Percent)

All Heads of Households	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Doctor's Office	81	81	80	80	79	78	78	77	76	74
Clinic	14	15	16	15	16	17	16	17	17	18
Hospital	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	5
Other	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	3
Heads of Households with TennCare	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Doctor's Office	72	76	78	79	76	76	79	76	75	73
Clinic	18	18	18	13	15	17	14	17	17	17
Hospital	8	7	3	7	7	6	6	6	6	7
Other	2	0	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	3

TABLE 9: Children: Medical Facilities Used When Medical Care Initially Sought (2014-2023) (Percent)

All Heads of Households	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Doctor's Office	87	86	85	84	85	78	83	81	81	80
Clinic	12	12	13	13	13	17	14	15	16	16
Hospital	1	1	1	2	2	3	2	3	2	3
Other	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	2	1	1	1	1
Heads of Households with TennCare ⁸	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Doctor's Office	84	83	86	85	85	76	83	82	82	80
Clinic	14	14	12	11	12	17	13	14	14	15
Hospital	1		3	2	4	3	6	3	4	4
Other	1		0	<1	0	<1	1	1	<1	<1

⁸ This subgroup includes all households in which at least one child is enrolled in TennCare, even if the head of the household is not enrolled.

TennCare recipients continue to see physicians on a more frequent basis than the average Tennessee household (Table 10). The proportion of all heads of households that reported seeing a doctor at least weekly or monthly was 17 percent in 2023 (14 percent in 2022), versus 29 percent of TennCare heads of households (up from 27 percent in 2022). In 2023, 14 percent of all households reported taking their children to visit a doctor at least monthly versus 19 percent for TennCare children. The rate of frequent visits increased for both children on TennCare and non-TennCare children (Table 11).

TABLE 10: Frequency of Visits to Doctor for Heads of Households (2014–2023) (Percent)

All Heads of Households	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Weekly	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	3
Monthly	11	11	12	12	11	13	12	12	12	14
Every Few Months	47	46	44	46	47	47	45	45	47	47
Yearly	25	25	26	26	25	23	25	24	23	21
Rarely	15	16	16	15	15	15	16	16	16	15
Heads of Households w/ TennCare	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Weekly	6	3	5	5	5	5	4	6	4	5
Monthly	31	26	31	28	26	28	22	25	23	24
Every Few Months	45	49	42	42	45	43	48	42	45	45
Yearly	11	9	10	14	12	12	15	14	15	14
Rarely	8	13	12	11	12	13	11	13	13	12

TABLE 11: Frequency of Visits to Doctor for Children (2014–2023) (Percent)

All Heads of Households	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Weekly	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
Monthly	9	7	8	7	7	10	8	8	10	12
Every Few Months	47	47	44	48	51	50	48	44	47	49
Yearly	35	36	38	36	35	32	36	40	35	31
Rarely	8	8	9	7	6	7	7	7	7	6
Heads of Households with TennCare⁹	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Weekly	2	1	3	3	2	2	2	4	3	3
Monthly	17	13	12	14	12	19	11	15	13	16
Every Few Months	53	51	53	48	57	52	51	46	52	51
Yearly	25	28	29	31	24	24	30	29	28	26
Rarely	2	5	4	4	5	4	6	6	4	4

⁹ This subgroup includes all households in which at least one child is enrolled in TennCare, even if the head of the household is not enrolled.

Ease of Obtaining a Doctor’s Appointment for TennCare Families

The reported time required for a family with TennCare to obtain an appointment decreased overall compared to 2022. The share of respondents who obtained an appointment within one day increased from 32 percent to 39 percent. Moreover, 69 percent of TennCare recipients were able to make a doctor’s appointment within a week, up from 62 percent in 2022 but still below the 75 percent in 2018. Nineteen percent reported waiting three weeks or longer for an appointment, down from 27 percent in 2022 (Table 12), but still higher than the 15 percent in 2018. TennCare patients reported waiting on average 44 minutes after arriving for their appointments. The average travel time to a physician’s office was 21 minutes (Table 13).

TABLE 12: Time between Attempt to Make Appointment and First Availability of Appointment: TennCare Heads of Households (2014–2023) (Percent)

When you last made an appointment to see a primary care physician for an illness in the last 12 months, how soon was the first appointment available?	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Same day	18	24	19	21	23	21	14	15	14	18
Next day	21	18	22	21	24	21	20	20	18	21
1 week	29	26	28	29	28	30	37	31	30	30
2 weeks	8	8	9	9	10	13	11	11	11	12
3 weeks	6	3	4	5	4	4	4	5	6	5
Over 3 weeks	19	21	18	14	11	11	14	18	21	14

TABLE 13: Wait for Appointments: TennCare Heads of Households (2014–2023) (Minutes)

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Number of minutes wait past scheduled appointment time?	53	63	52	42	50	45	42	37	44	44
Number of minutes to travel to physician's office?	22	27	24	22	23	26	23	23	25	21

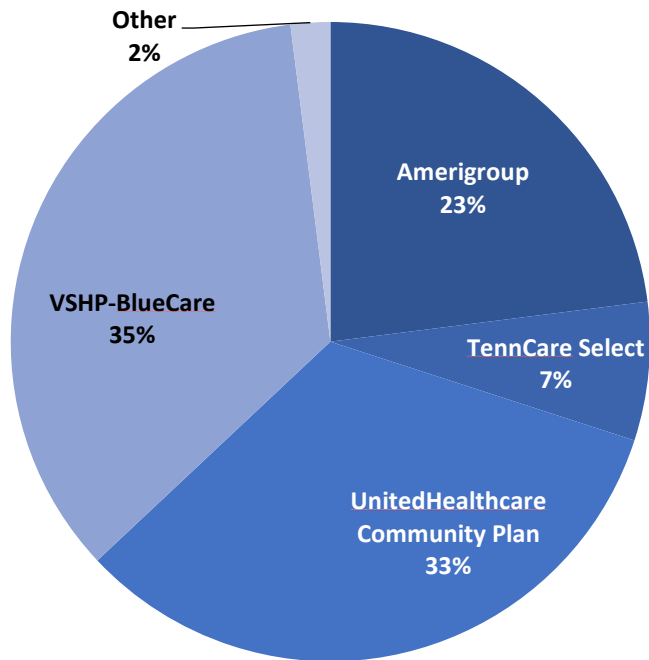
TennCare Plans

TennCare participants are covered by one of four health plans. Table 14 and Figure 2 below report the responses from our 2023 survey. About 91 percent of TennCare household members surveyed reported being signed up with Volunteer State Health Plan (35 percent), UnitedHealthcare (33 percent) or Amerigroup (23 percent). The remaining 9 percent report being enrolled in TennCare Select or gave an incorrect answer.

TABLE 14: Reported TennCare Plan (2018–2023) (Percent)

What company manages your TennCare plan?	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Amerigroup	21	21	24	22	24	23
TennCare Select	8	8	7	7	9	7
UnitedHealthcare Community Plan	33	33	32	34	32	33
VSHP -- BlueCare	36	36	34	34	33	35
Other	2	2	3	3	2	2

FIGURE 2: Reported TennCare Plan (2023)



Six percent of respondents indicated that they had changed plans within the preceding 12 months. Of that total, 40 percent requested the change. The most commonly-cited reason for changing plans was “limited choice of doctors and hospitals.”

Seventy-six percent of TennCare heads of households reported receiving a list of rights and responsibilities this year. Fifty-nine percent of households reported receiving an enrollment card and 67 percent reported receiving information about filing an appeal. These results are very similar to those reported in 2022 (Table 15).

TABLE 15: Households Receiving TennCare Information from Plans (2014–2023) (Percent)

Please indicate whether or not you or anyone in your household has received each of the following regarding TennCare	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
An enrollment card	63	69	67	71	67	69	59	62	61	59
Information on filing appeals	70	82	76	76	74	70	64	66	66	67
A list of rights and responsibilities	78	85	81	82	79	75	72	74	74	76
Name of MCO to whom assigned	76	84	81	81	75	76	71	72	73	77

Mail has held steady as the most popular mode of communication for TennCare households. Approximately 63 percent reported that mail is still the preferred method for receiving information. Those who prefer getting information via email or website increased slightly to 21 percent in 2023, up from 20 percent in 2022. (Table 16).

TABLE 16: Best Way to Get Information about TennCare (2014–2023) (Percent)

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Mail	75	78	78	72	73	64	64	62	62	63
Doctor	5	4	5	6	3	6	5	7	5	5
Phone	6	8	4	5	4	4	6	6	6	5
Handbook	4	3	2	4	4	4	2	2	3	2
Drug Store	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	1	1	<1	<1
Friends	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	2	3	1	1
TV	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	1	1	<1	1	<1
Paper	<1	0	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1	<1
Email			5	5	7	10	12	13	14	14
Website			4	4	6	7	5	4	6	7
Other	8	6	<1	<1	1	2	2	1	1	1

In the past 12 months, 12 percent of TennCare households used a non-emergency care provider that did not participate in their plan (down from 14 percent in 2022), with 53 percent of that 12 percent stating that they used non-participating providers one to two times (Figure 3). Of the 12 percent of TennCare households using non-participating providers, the most common type of care sought was from a general medical care/family doctor, followed by dental care and eye care (Table 17 and Figure 4).

FIGURE 3: Number of Times Sought Non-Emergency Care at a Non-Participating Provider in Past 12 Months (Percent)

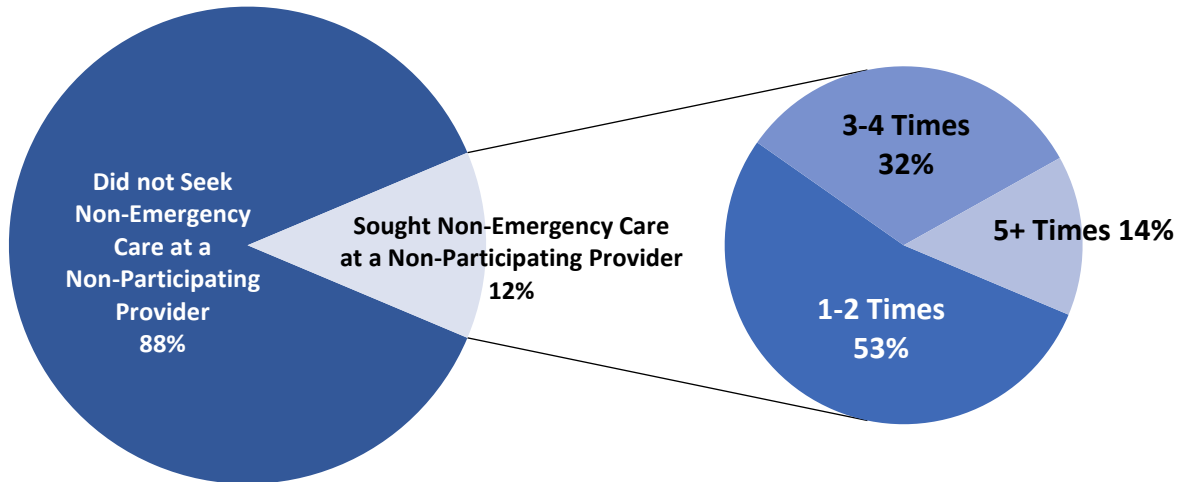
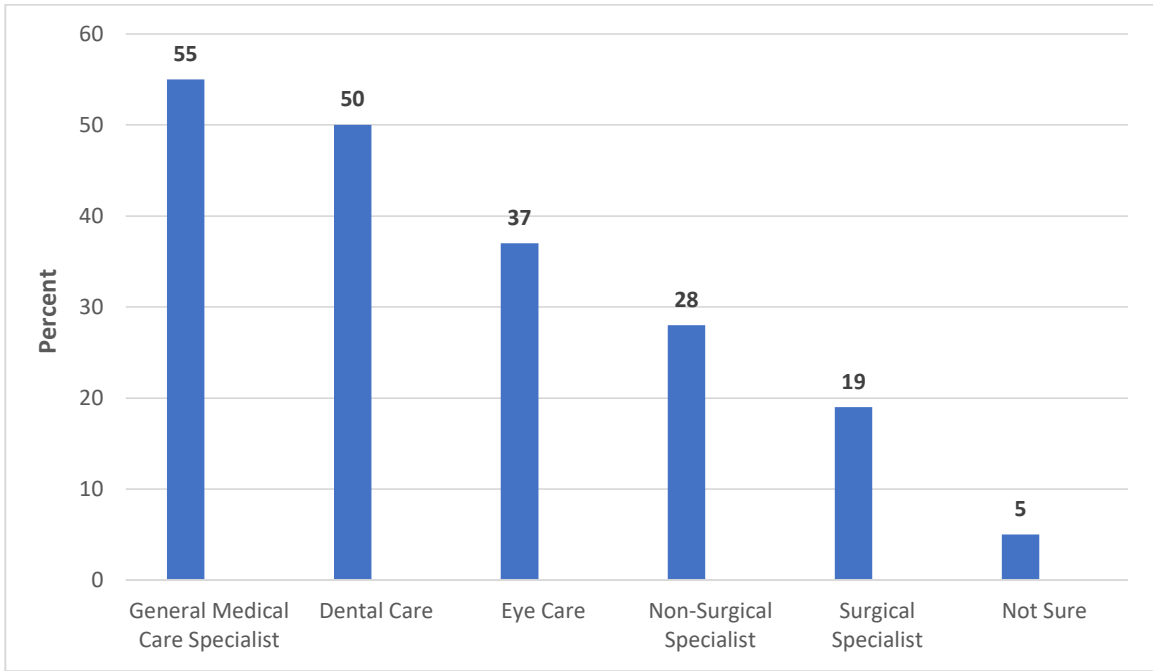


TABLE 17: Type of Non-Emergency Care Sought from a Non-TennCare Provider (2022-2023) (Percent)

	2022	2023
General Medical Care Specialist	39	55
Dental Care	33	50
Eye Care	20	37
Non-Surgical Specialist	21	28
Surgical Specialist	12	19
Not Sure	4	5

Respondents could choose more than one type of non-emergency care.

FIGURE 4: Type of Non-Emergency Care Sought from a Non-TennCare Provider (2023)



Approximately 5 percent of all TennCare households sought care from a non-TennCare provider because the service was not covered under TennCare, 2 percent because there was not a TennCare provider in the area, and 3 percent mistakenly made an appointment with a provider that did not accept TennCare. Only 1 percent sought alternative care because they were dissatisfied with the quality of service from the TennCare provider (Table 18). Almost half of the respondents (45 percent) reported that TennCare helped them find a provider that participated in the TennCare plan.

TABLE 18: Reasons Sought Non-Emergency Care from a Non-TennCare Provider (2023) (Percent of TennCare Recipients)

	2023
Dissatisfaction with quality of service from TennCare provider	1
Service was not covered by TennCare	5
No TennCare provider in the area	2
Could not get timely appointment with TennCare provider	1
When I made the appointment or received care, I mistakenly thought the provider participated in my TennCare health care plan	3

Conclusion

The number of uninsured Tennesseans increased by approximately 19,800 in 2023, with the overall uninsured rate increasing slightly from 7.5 in 2022 to 7.7 percent in 2023. The proportion of uninsured adults was essentially unchanged (9.0 percent in 2022 to 9.1 percent in 2023), while the proportion of uninsured children increased slightly from 2.3 percent in 2022 to 2.5 percent in 2023. Overall, the uninsured population is very similar to the prior year.

Respondents report near record high levels of satisfaction with the TennCare program overall and with the quality of care received by heads of households and their children. For TennCare households, 95 percent report that they are very or somewhat satisfied by the program overall. For quality of care, 77 percent of TennCare heads of households reported that quality of care was excellent or good, and 86 percent of TennCare households reported excellent or good quality of care for their children. For the first time in our survey, reported quality of care for TennCare households and their children meet or exceed reported quality of care for all Tennessee households.

Affordability continues to be the major reason for not having insurance, cited by approximately 78 percent of respondents across all income categories. For those covered by TennCare, 90 percent of heads of households and 95 percent of their children first sought medical care at a doctor's office or clinic versus a hospital. Only 12 percent of TennCare families reported needing to use non-emergency care providers that do not participate with their plan, primarily because the service was not provided by TennCare.

Overall, TennCare continues to receive positive feedback from its recipients, with 95 percent reporting satisfaction with the program. This positive feedback is a strong indication that TennCare is providing satisfactory medical care and meeting the expectations of those it serves.