

Healthcare Access Barriers Report: *Findings, Sources, Definitions, and Notes*

Vernon Parish, Louisiana 2001-2002

May 22, 2002

A Study Directed by the
Central Louisiana Area Health Education Center (CLAHEC)

Data Gathered and Analyzed by the
Health Informatics Center of Acadiana (HICA) at The University of Louisiana at Lafayette

in Collaboration with CLAHEC and the Louisiana Rural Health Access Program (LRHAP)
of the Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center

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HEALTHCARE ACCESS BARRIERS IN VERNON PARISH

Access to Healthcare

In *Healthy People 2010: Understanding and Improving Health*, released in January 2000 by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, “Access to Healthcare” is identified as one of ten “leading health indicators” to be tracked as communities seek to improve the health status of their citizens in the first decade of the Twenty-first Century. That report suggests “Strong predictors of access to quality health care include having **health insurance, a higher income level, and a regular primary care provider or other source on ongoing healthcare.**” Each forward-thinking community should have a mechanism for periodically measuring healthcare access and for monitoring the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at reducing healthcare access barriers.

Study Purpose and Financial Support

The purpose of the Study on which this document reports was to collect data on access to healthcare in Central Louisiana, specifically the parishes of Allen, Avoyelles, Catahoula, and Vernon. Data so collected could be used to serve as a baseline for Healthy People 2010 initiatives in Central Louisiana. Goals were to identify current problems and to gauge their magnitude. The underlying causes of access problems can be investigated in more depth now that this initial assessment has been completed. The Study was funded by a grant from The Rapides Foundation of Alexandria, Louisiana, consistent with its agenda to support healthcare access initiatives in Central Louisiana.

Study Leadership and Partnerships

This Study was directed by Central Louisiana Area Health Education Center (CLAHEC), which was also responsible for the Primary Care Provider Survey component of the Study. Playing a key role in the effort was the Health Informatics Center of Acadiana (HICA) at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, which was responsible for the development and application of the methodology called *Louisiana HABITS (Healthcare Access Barriers In The State)* and for analysis of all Study data. Existing healthcare utilization data were obtained under the auspices of Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center (LSUHSC) in New Orleans.

Intended Audiences

The authors of this report recognize that there are four audiences that may have distinctive yet overlapping interests in the results of this Study. Those audiences are (1) the Board of Trustees and staff of The Rapides Foundation, (2) potential healthcare access initiative leaders who may seek funding from the Foundation, (3) community leaders and the general public in the Study Area parishes, and (4) researchers. No one style of report may fulfill all of the needs of the distinct audiences. This report is intended primarily for the first two audiences, providing moderately detailed information reflecting findings of the primary research efforts of this Study. The third audience may be better served by reviewing a booklet entitled “Healthcare Access Barriers in Central Louisiana: Vernon Parish Louisiana 2001-2002,” which may be published later at the discretion of The Rapides Foundation. Researchers in the fourth audience are referred to The Rapides Foundation staff for possible access to raw data sources.

What Is a “Healthcare Access Barrier”?

For the purposes of this Study, a household is said to experience a “barrier to access to healthcare services” if any one or more of the following three situations exist.

1. *In the last 12 months*, one or more household members had **some problem obtaining healthcare services**, including:
 - a) Difficulty in obtaining care.
 - b) Delayed seeking care.
 - c) Did not receive the care they thought they should have.
2. *In the last 12 months*, one or more household members had **some problem obtaining medications** that had been prescribed for them.
3. *Currently*, one or more household members **lack health insurance coverage** or a “medical card.”

Why Are People Vulnerable to Healthcare Access Barriers?

Healthy People 2010: Understanding and Improving Health identifies three categories of barriers which may affect a person’s or a household’s ability to obtain access to healthcare services:

- “**Financial barriers** include not having health insurance, not having enough health insurance to cover needed services, or not having the financial capacity to cover services outside a healthplan or insurance program.”
- “**Structural barriers** include the lack of primary care providers, medical specialists, or other healthcare professionals to meet special needs or the lack of healthcare facilities.”
- “**Personal barriers** include cultural or spiritual differences, language barriers, not knowing what to do or when to seek care, or concerns about confidentiality or discrimination.”

Lack of transportation to a distant healthcare provider can constitute a barrier that is simultaneously financial, structural, and personal.

STUDY METHODS

The investigation involved a census of primary healthcare providers, application of a healthcare consumer survey, and review of healthcare services utilization data from the school-based health center administered by CHRISTUS St. Frances Cabrini Hospital, the state hospital system, the Medicaid program, the Louisiana Office of Public Health, and the Louisiana Hospital Association.

Supply of Healthcare Providers

Summary. The following licensing databases were consulted: the database of the Louisiana State Board of Medical Examiners (LSBME), responsible for licensing physicians and physician assistants, and the database of the Louisiana State Board of Nurses (LSBN) responsible for licensing nurse practitioners. The mailing addresses that are reported to these licensing boards by the healthcare professional may or may not be their practice addresses. The primary or secondary specialty reported to the licensing boards may or may not be the specialty currently being practiced by the healthcare professional. Therefore, no conclusive evidence of the sites or current specializations of their practices was available. In part to overcome this limitation, the Louisiana Office of Public Health (OPH) has conducted an “Environmental Scan.” Provider compliance with this census was voluntary and substantially incomplete in most areas of the state. Because the existing data sources were found lacking, this Study found it necessary to undertake its own **Primary Care Provider Survey**, the results of which are reported herein.

Preparation for the survey. In August, 2001, CLAHEC’s data technician requested data about primary care physicians and physician assistants – name, address, phone number, primary and secondary specialty – in Allen, Avoyelles, Catahoula, and Vernon Parishes from the Louisiana State Board of Medical Examiners (LSBME). In addition, the data technician requested information about nurse practitioners in the same four parishes from the Louisiana State Board of Nursing (LSBN). The data in both LSBN’s and LSBME’s databases were collected in December, 2000. All physicians licensed to practice in either of the four parishes studied, who identified any primary care specialty (i.e., Family Practice, General Practice, Internal Medicine, Pediatrics, Obstetrics, Gynecology or Ob/Gyn) as their primary or secondary specialty, and all Physician’s Assistants and Nurse Practitioners were asked to participate in the primary care provider survey.

Additional providers were identified from medical staff lists obtained as confidential information from local hospitals in the three parishes housing those facilities. Those providers missing from the databases of the licensing boards included ones new to the community, newly-licensed to practice in the state, currently practicing in a primary care specialty in one of the studied parishes though listed by the LSBME or LSBN as licensed to practice in a parish outside the study area, or physicians currently practicing in a primary care specialty while not acknowledged as doing so in the data received from the LSBME.

Methodology. Dillman's¹ protocol for mail surveys was employed in this study. In late September, 2001, each provider received a pre-notification letter that informed the participant about the study – its purpose, sponsoring and participating organizations, individual responsibilities, and reasons to participate – and stated that they would receive a survey tool soon. The following week, they received a survey packet consisting of cover letter and one-page survey with instructions for returning the completed survey by fax or mail. Survey tools were mailed to five (5) nurse practitioners, three (3) physician assistants, and fifty (50) physicians.

Two weeks after mailing the initial survey packet, a postcard was sent to each provider who had not yet returned the survey tool. Two weeks after mailing the postcard, those providers who still had not responded received another complete survey packet with survey tool and cover letter, urging them to complete and return the tool. Two weeks after the second survey packet was mailed, if contact information were available, the researcher called the provider's office, requesting validation of practice specialty and main office address. The telephone number was retrieved from the local telephone book or Directory Assistance if no other source was available.

¹Dillman, D. (2000). Mail and Internet Surveys: The Tailored Design Method (2nd edition). New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Return Rates in Vernon Parish. Responses were received from 100% (2) of the nurse practitioners licensed by the LSBN and living in Vernon Parish and 70.6% (12) of the physicians licensed by the LSBME and living in Vernon Parish. One of the three (3) physician assistants (33%) who resided in Vernon Parish responded to the survey. Follow-up telephone calls by the researcher yielded current practice status for all primary care physicians in the parish.

Results in Vernon Parish. Results of the Primary Care Provider Survey indicate that seventeen (17) primary care physicians practice in Vernon Parish, representing the following primary care specialties: Family Practice, three (3); General Practice, two (2); Internal Medicine, six (6); Obstetrics/Gynecology, two (2); Pediatrics, four (4). In addition, one (1) nurse practitioner and two (2) physician assistants practice at least part-time in Vernon Parish.

Utilization of Healthcare Services

Summary. The Study Team was given the opportunity to review healthcare service utilization data -- without patient identifiers – for persons residing in the Study Area and for providers practicing in the Study Area. Sources of this data were the Louisiana Medicaid program, the Louisiana Office of Public Health, Huey P. Long Medical Center ambulatory services (through the LSUHSC Health Care Services Division (HCS)), and the Louisiana Hospital Information Network (LHIN). The Study Team recognizes that, as insightful as these data are, their view of healthcare services utilization in the Study Area is incomplete since no repository of encounter data exists for all services rendered by public and private healthcare providers.

Preparation for utilization data acquisition. Somewhat ironically, the goal of the Study Team was to learn about healthcare services not sought and thus not provided, due to the presence of healthcare access barriers! The Team did recognize, however, that utilization data about services sought and provided by persons in the “near barrier population” might prove to be a reasonable surrogate – an approximate “mirror” of the level of care that the “barrier population” might seek if there were no barriers. On this basis, the Study Team determined that utilization data from the Parish Health Units, from the Medicaid program, from school-based health centers, and from the regional state-run charity hospital (LSUHSC Huey P. Long Medical Center) would be requested from the appropriate agencies. In addition, the Team learned that it would be possible for it to obtain hospital discharge data from the Louisiana Hospital Information Network (LHIN), a service of the Louisiana Hospital Association (LHA).

Geographical (but not personal) identification. Since the goal of the Study Team’s interest in utilization data was to learn how healthcare services are employed by residents in each of the Study Area parishes, any data requested by the Team must be available with some sort of geographical locator. Data sources that were not resolvable to at least the parish level would not be useful. The Study had no interest in personally identifiable information and would in fact have been prohibited from accessing personally identifiable information in the Institutional Review Board application process. It was determined that, to be useful to this Study, any data requested must include the zipcode of both the patient and the provider, and possibly also the telephone number of both, the latter for geographical mapping purposes only. All data sources agreed to forward the former but not the latter; however, the first three digits (the exchange) of the patients’ telephone numbers were forwarded as a compromise.

Costs of utilization data acquisition. Useful sources of healthcare services utilization data were carefully considered, as was the likelihood that costs might be incurred in their acquisition. A modest fee for programming the extraction of the Medicaid program data was required. Medicare data would have had a substantial acquisition cost associated, so it was not requested.

Consumer Perceptions and Demand for Healthcare Services

Summary. The Study Team felt that data reported previously from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) -- sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and administered statewide on a monthly basis by the Louisiana Office of Public Health (OPH) -- was based on a sample size insufficient to justify confidence for local use. The Study reviewed the most current U. S. Census Bureau data, to determine the population and number of households and to set criteria for random sample size sufficient to yield 95% predictive confidence, with a maximum error rate of $\pm 10\%$. The UL Lafayette-developed computer-assisted consumer survey *Louisiana HABITS (Healthcare Access Barriers In The State)* was then employed to gather data from a random sample of at least 96 households with telephones, to determine the proportion of the **general population** of households which report having a healthcare access barrier. In addition, to obtain a better “profile” of households with barriers, the Study Team conducted in-person interviews at locations where persons whose households likely had healthcare access barriers might have been readily found. Data from at least 96 households in

the “**barrier population**” were thus gathered, using interviewing locations that included the food stamp office, the health unit, the courthouse, public hospital emergency rooms and clinics, and even rural grocery stores and laundromats.

Preparation for the survey. In its planning to understand consumer perceptions and demand for healthcare services, the Study Team took on the task of answering the question: How should the percentage of all households in the **General Population** that have “healthcare access barriers” be most easily and accurately determined? The working definition of “healthcare access barrier” was stated previously in this report. A fundamental concern was protection of respondent confidentiality. The Study Team recognized that a random-digit-dialed telephone interview method would be preferred, due to low cost when compared to in-person interviewing and high compliance when compared to mailed surveys.

The Study Team was concerned, however, that prior surveys using telephone-only interviews were inaccurate when a certain fraction of all households have no telephone. Review of market research data suggested that between 8% and 15% of households in Central Louisiana are without working telephones, varying by parish. This percentage is likely to have a substantial impact on the results of a “healthcare access barriers” study, since many of the households that lack telephones are the same ones that have a “healthcare access barrier.” The Team therefore developed an approach to sampling households with no telephones, one that supplemented the random-dialed telephone interview round with a round of in-person interviews, in which persons from households without telephones were actively sought out.

A much more important potential byproduct of the telephone round plus in-person round approach soon became evident. A more in-depth profile of the households in a **Barrier Population** could be obtained by combining the barrier households identified in the random telephone sample telephone with barrier households identified in an expanded in-person interview sample. In addition to allowing the computation of a “no phone” adjustment to the findings of the random-digit-dialed telephone survey, the Study could also gain statistically significant predictive knowledge of the underlying causes of the barriers, including the following:

- Main reason cited by those reporting a problem obtaining healthcare services,
- Main reason cited by those reporting a problem obtaining prescribed medications,
- Main reason cited by those reporting lack of insurance, and other pertinent statistics.

Sample size determination. The Study Team determined its preferred sample size as 96 households in the general population and also 96 households in the Barrier Population, to yield an error interval of $\pm 10\%$ at a 95% level of predictive confidence. To achieve a $\pm 5\%$ interval, the Study would have had to quadruple its interviews of each population in each parish, a target that was beyond the reach of budgeted resources and time. To achieve a 2.5% interval, a nearly fifteen-fold increase in interviews would have been necessary.

FINDINGS

Selected findings of this study are detailed in narrative, tabular, graphical, and map form in the remaining pages of this report. Findings are organized into sections as follows:

- Supply of Healthcare Providers, including the number of primary care physicians, nurse practitioners, and facilities in the following categories:
 - Primary Care Professionals
 - Primary Care Clinics or Health Centers, Freestanding
 - Primary Care Clinics or Health Centers, Hospital-Based
 - Hospitals, Community (general, short-term, acute care)

- Utilization of Healthcare Services, including Medicaid claims, Parish Health Unit visits, Huey P. Long Medical Center clinic visits, and/or hospital admissions associated with the previously documented categories of primary care healthcare providers:
 - Primary Care Professionals
 - Primary Care Clinics or Health Centers, Freestanding
 - Primary Care Clinics or Health Centers, Hospital-Based
 - Hospitals, Community (general, short-term, acute care)

- Consumer Perceptions and Demand for Healthcare Services, including responses from the following *Louisiana HABITS* survey sequences:
 - *Louisiana HABITS* Household Sequence
 - *Louisiana HABITS* Barriers Sequence
 - *Louisiana HABITS* Care Source Sequence
 - *Louisiana HABITS* Satisfaction Sequence
 - *Louisiana HABITS* Health Status Sequence
 - *Louisiana HABITS* Demographics Sequence

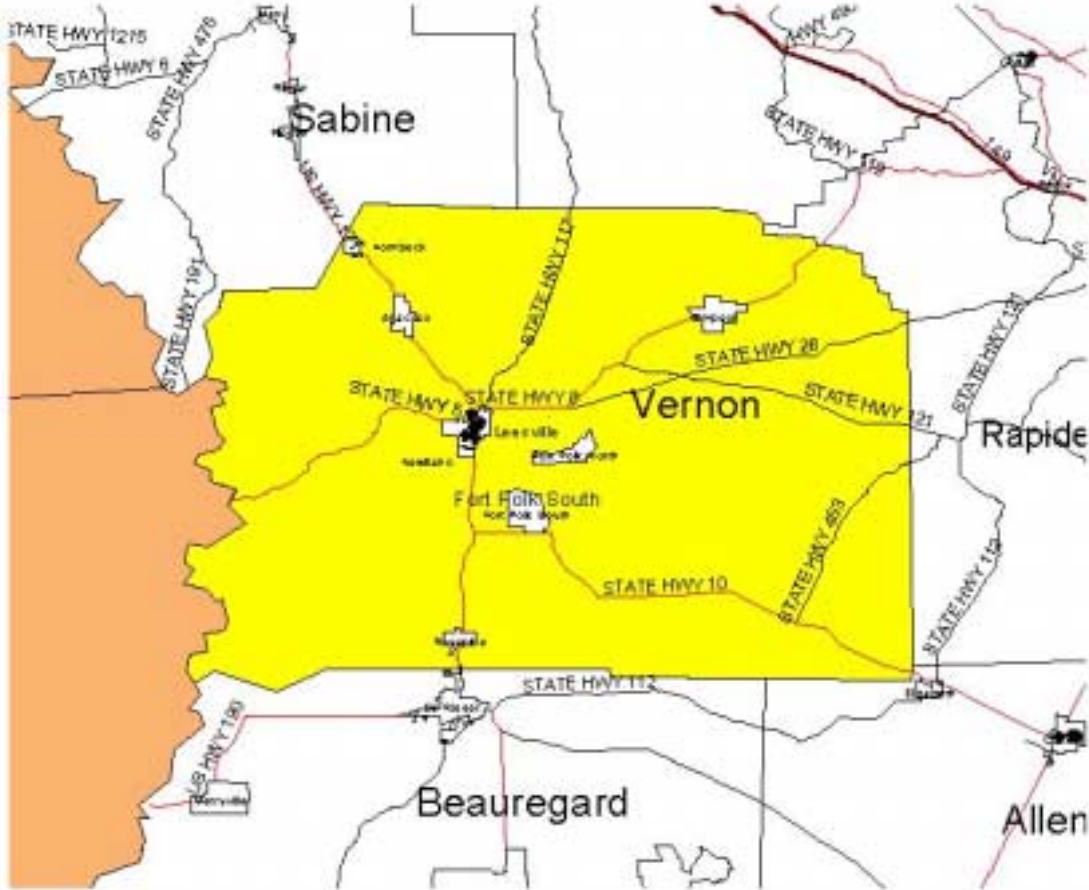
Supply of Healthcare Providers

The following sources of information were consulted in pursuit of information as to the number and types of healthcare professionals serving Vernon Parish: the Louisiana State Board of Medical Examiners (LSBME), the Louisiana State Board of Nursing (LSBN), Louisiana Office of Public Health (OPH) Environmental Scan. Some confusion among sources was noted, especially in that the licensing bureaus may have had the home address on record instead of the practice address for certain entries. As a result, a Primary Care Provider Census was conducted as a part of the current study. Findings of that census are reported below, first for individual professionals.

Primary Care Professionals	# Practicing in Vernon Parish	Notes
Family Practice Physicians	3	Louisiana State Board of Medical Examiners (LSBME) reports 3 Family Practice physicians who maintain offices in Vernon Parish, though one no longer practices in the parish. One of the three who does live and practice in the parish failed to identify the specialty in the LSBME database.
General Practice Physicians	2	Louisiana State Board of Medical Examiners (LSBME) reports two General Practice physicians as this study validated.
Internal Medicine Physicians	6	Louisiana State Board of Medical Examiners (LSBME) reports nine Internal Medicine physicians, though three no longer practice in the parish.
Obstetrics/Gynecology Physicians	2	Louisiana State Board of Medical Examiners (LSBME) reports one Obstetrician / Gynecology physician. This study identified an additional OB/GYN.
Pediatric Physicians	4	Louisiana State Board of Medical Examiners (LSBME) reports two Pediatric physicians. This study verified two additional, new Pediatricians.
Nurse Practitioners	1	Louisiana State Board of Nursing (LSBN) reports two Nurse Practitioners in Vernon Parish. One lives in Vernon but practices in a neighboring parish.

The geographical distribution of primary healthcare providers in Vernon Parish is depicted in the following map.

Provider Locations



In addition to individual healthcare professionals, the following types of institutional providers were considered when identifying potential sources of primary care services. In some instances, the principal services offered by an institution are not what would be typically considered “primary care,” i.e., hospitals principally offer acute care services.

Primary Care Clinics or Health Centers, Freestanding	# Located in Vernon Parish	Notes
Centers, Community Health (Federally funded) Federal Qualified Health Center (FQHC)	1	There is one FQHC in Vernon Parish: Outpatient Medical Center, 900 North 5 th Street, Suite 14, Leesville 71496
Centers, School-Based Health (SBHC)	0	There is no SBHC in Vernon Parish.
Clinics, Faith-based	0	There is no Faith-based Clinic in Vernon Parish
Clinics for the working poor, “Free”	0	There is no Free Clinic for the working poor in Vernon Parish
Clinics, Rural Health	0	There is no Rural Health Clinic in Vernon Parish
Clinics, State-owned	0	There is no State-owned Clinic in Vernon Parish
Clinics, Walk-in	0	There is no Walk-in Clinic in Vernon Parish
Parish Health Units	1	Vernon Parish Health Unit, 406 Fertitta Blvd., Leesville, 71496

Primary Care Clinics or Health Centers, Hospital-based	# Located in Vernon Parish	
Clinics, Hospital-based (non-governmental)	0	There is no non-governmental hospital-based clinic in Vernon Parish.
Clinics, Hospital-based (State-owned)	0	There is no state-owned, hospital-based clinic in Vernon Parish.
Clinics, Hospital-based (Military or Veterans)	6	Bayne-Jones Army Community Hospital, Ft. Polk, has six primary care, outpatient clinics: Family Practice, Internal Medicine, Obstetrics, Gynecology, Pediatrics, and Wellness

Hospitals, Community (general, short-term, acute care)	# Located in Vernon Parish	
Community Hospitals (Not-For-Profit or For-Profit)	1 (70 beds)	Byrd Regional Hospital, 1020 Fertitta Blvd., Leesville 71446
Community Hospitals (State-owned)	0	There is no state-owned hospital in Vernon Parish.
Federal Hospitals (Military or Veterans)	1 (169 beds)	Bayne-Jones Army Community Hospital, US Army Medical Dept. Activity, Ft Polk, 71459-5110

Utilization of Healthcare Services

In Louisiana, there is no universal state-mandated reporting of primary care utilization data, such as visits to the doctor. Instead, this study had to rely on a variety of sources of information to provide insight into the level of care sought and provided in the study area. The following sources of information were consulted to estimate the number and types of primary care visits involving residents of Vernon Parish.

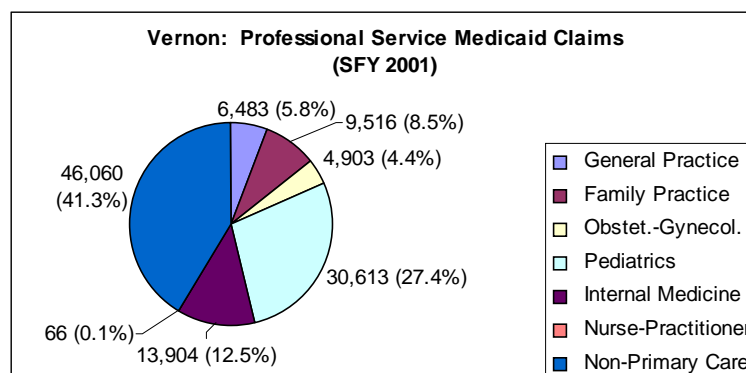
1. Ambulatory care claims data from the Louisiana Medicaid program
2. Clinic visit data from the LSUHSC-operated Huey P. Long Medical Center and Clinics
3. Hospital discharge data from the Louisiana Hospital Information Network (LHIN)
4. Parish Health Unit visit data from the Louisiana Office of Public Health (OPH) Region VI

In other parishes in the study area, additional sources of information were found to be available to the researcher, including:

5. Visit data from the School-Based Health Center program (SBHC)
6. Visit data from a Rural Health Clinic (CHRISTUS St. Frances Cabrini Family Care Unit)
7. Visit data from the Working People's Free Clinic (Alexandria)
8. Visit data from various faith-based clinics or wellness programs, including the Enterprise Baptist Church Neighborhood Clinic and the St. Matthew's Baptist Church Wellness Center (Alexandria)

The following tables detail specific information gathered from the above sources.

By Claim-Parish (Eligibility-Parish of Medicaid Recipient)	Number of Claims*	Percentage of Parish	Percentage of 11-Parish Region**
Vernon	111,545	100.000%	11.273%
General Practice	6,483	5.812%	5.185%
Family Practice	9,516	8.531%	9.618%
Obstet.-Gynecol.	4,903	4.396%	7.823%
Pediatrics	30,613	27.445%	17.802%
Internal Medicine	13,904	12.465%	15.904%
Nurse-Practitioner	66	0.059%	5.132%
Total Primary Care	65,485	58.707%	6.618%
Non-Primary Care	46,060	41.293%	10.417%



* "Claim" indicates paid line items on physician-submitted HCFA-1500.
 ** "11-Parish Region" is the Rapides Foundation Service Area.

Primary Care Clinics or Health Centers, Freestanding	Patient Visits <i>in Vernon Parish</i> by Vernon Parish Residents	Source or Notes
Centers, Community Health (Federally funded)	No. of patient visits unavailable	One Federally Qualified Health Centers in Vernon Parish
Centers, School-Based Health (SBHC)	0 patient visits	No SBHC in Vernon Parish
Clinics, Faith-based	0 patient visits	No faith-based clinics in Vernon Parish
Clinics for the Working Poor, "Free"	0 patient visits	No free clinics for the working poor in Vernon Parish
Clinics, Rural Health	0 patient visits	No rural health clinics in Vernon Parish
Clinics, State-owned	0 patient visits	No state-owned clinics in Vernon Parish
Clinics, Walk-In	0 patient visits	No walk-in clinics in Vernon Parish
Parish Health Units	929 patient encounters	OPH PHU Visit Data, January – December, 2000

Primary Care Clinics or Health Centers, Hospital-based	Patient Visits by Vernon Parish Residents	Source or Notes
Clinics, Hospital-based (non-governmental)	0	No non-governmental hospital-based clinics in Vernon Parish
Clinics, Hospital-based (State-owned)	2,547 patient visits	Huey P. Long Medical Center ambulatory care data, January-December 2000
Clinics, Hospital-based (Military or Veterans)	No. patient visits unavailable	Six military hospital-based clinics in Vernon Parish

Hospital admissions and discharges are not considered “primary care.” Care provided in hospitals is usually for “acute” or “chronic” illness rather than preventive or primary care. Still, it is of interest to examine the locations of hospitals that are used by Vernon Parish Residents when hospitalization is required. The following table lists Central Louisiana hospitals used by Vernon Parish residents.

Hospitals, Community (general, short-term, acute care)	Admissions of Vernon Parish Residents	Source or Notes
Allen Parish Hospital	Not Reported	This facility was not a reporting member-subscriber of the Louisiana Hospital Information Network in 1999.
Avoyelles Hospital	0	Louisiana Hospital Information Network (LHIN), January – December 1999
Bayne-Jones Army Community Hospital	Not Reported	This facility was not a reporting member-subscriber of the Louisiana Hospital Information Network in 1999.
Bunkie General Hospital	0	LHIN, January-December 1999
Byrd Regional Hospital	491	LHIN, January-December 1999
CHRISTUS - St. Frances Cabrini Hospital	547	LHIN, January-December 1999
Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center	Not Reported	This facility was not a reporting member-subscriber of the Louisiana Hospital Information Network in 1999.
Hardtner Medical Center	Not Reported	This facility was not a reporting member-subscriber of the Louisiana Hospital Information Network in 1999.
Huey P. Long Medical Center	135	LHIN, January-December 1999
LaSalle General Hospital	Not Reported	This facility was not a reporting member-subscriber of the Louisiana Hospital Information Network in 1999.
Natchitoches Parish Hospital	Not Reported	This facility was not a reporting member-subscriber of the Louisiana Hospital Information Network in 1999.
Oakdale Community Hospital	43	LHIN, January-December 1999
Rapides Regional Medical Center	330	LHIN, January-December 1999
Riverland Medical Center	0	LHIN, January-December 1999
Savoy Medical Center	8	LHIN, January-December 1999
Ville Platte Medical Center	0	LHIN, January-December 1999
Winn Parish Medical Center	0	LHIN, January-December 1999

Consumer Perceptions and Demand for Healthcare Services

The tables, charts, graphs, and maps appearing in this section document responses of the General Population and the Barrier Population to questions in the *Louisiana HABITS* (Healthcare Access Barriers In The State) methodology developed by the Health Informatics Center of Acadiana at The University of Louisiana at Lafayette. *Louisiana HABITS* is currently also in use in the Acadiana region of South Central Louisiana to document healthcare access barriers there as part of the Louisiana Rural Health Access Program.

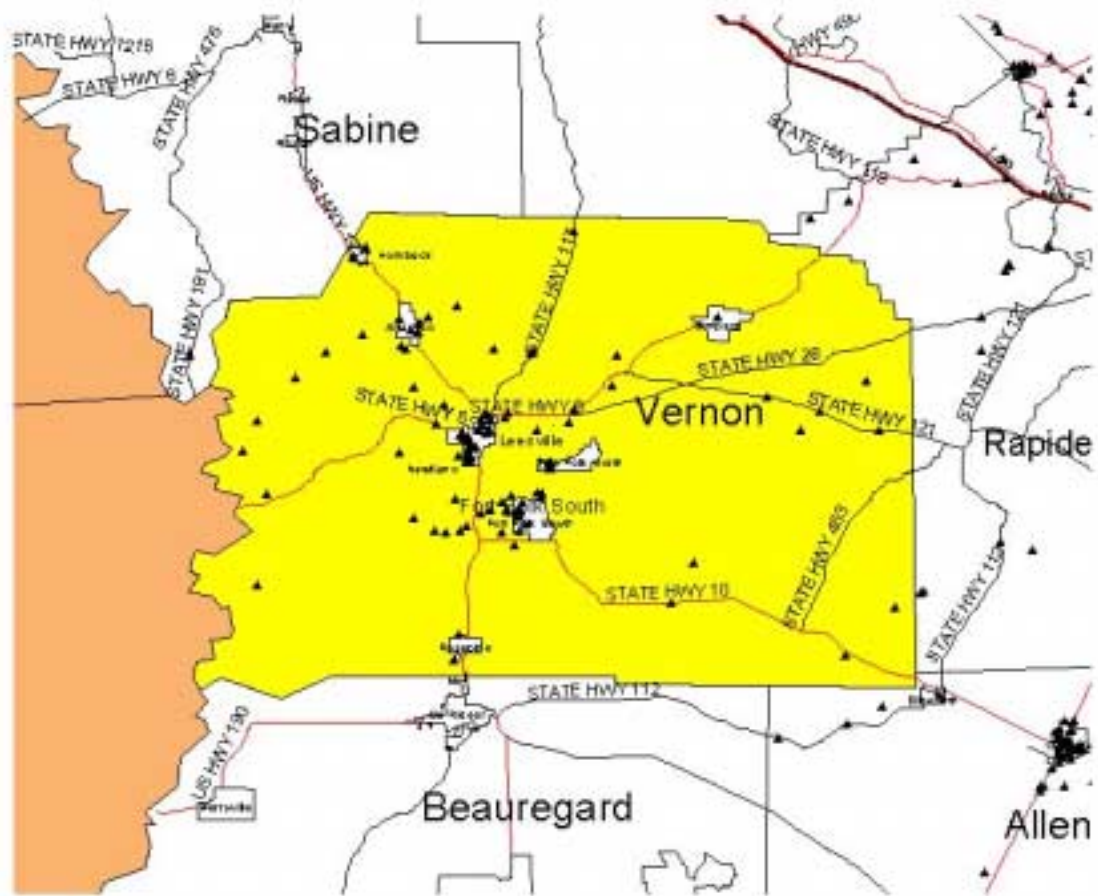
Louisiana HABITS Household Sequence

The “Household Sequence” of question in the *Louisiana HABITS* interview included questions about the size and make-up of the household that the respondent was representing.

Household Sequence Questions		General Population (96 Households)	Barrier Population (98 Households)
Question Identifier	Full Text of the Question		
<i>Adults:</i>	<i>Counting yourself, how many adults are among the family members in your household?</i>	185	195
<i>S105a:</i>	<i>How many children for whom you make healthcare decisions live in your household and are less than 5 years old?</i>	25	55
<i>S105b:</i>	<i>How many children for whom you make healthcare decisions live in your household and are 5 through 12 years old?</i>	46	62
<i>S105c:</i>	<i>How many children for whom you make healthcare decisions live in your household and are 13 through 17 years old?</i>	20	20
<i>Seniors:</i>	<i>How many persons 65 years of age or older are among the family members in your household?</i>	19	11
<i>WrkngPhn:</i>	<i>Do you have a working phone in your household?</i>	100%	72.9%
<i>Internet:</i>	<i>Do you have access to the Internet from your household?</i>	60.4%	38.8%

The geographic distribution of respondent home addresses is depicted in the map on the following page.

Respondent Locations



Louisiana HABITS Barriers Sequence

The “Barriers Sequence” of questions in the *Louisiana HABITS* interview included questions about problems experienced by family members in the household that the respondent was representing. Responses to questions in this sequence formed this Study’s basis for determination of the responding household’s membership in the “Barrier Population.”

<p style="text-align: center;">Healthcare Access Barriers in Vernon Parish</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>General Population</u> based on a random sample, conducted by telephone, of 96 households <u>with working telephones</u></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>“No-Phone Population”</u> based on a random sample, conducted in person, of 19 households <u>without working telephones</u></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>“No-Phone Adjusted General Population”</u> weighted according to the proportion of households estimated to be <u>with</u> working telephones vs. <u>without</u> working telephones: 88.7% vs. 11.3% in 1990</p>
<p>One or more household members had some problem in the last 12 months ...</p> <p>1. <u>Problem obtaining healthcare services</u>, including</p> <p>a) <u>Difficulty</u> in obtaining care</p> <p>b) <u>Delayed</u> seeking care</p> <p>c) <u>Did not receive</u> the care they thought they should have</p>	<p>18.8%</p>	<p>78.9%</p>	<p>25.6%</p>
<p>2. <u>Problem obtaining prescribed medications</u></p>	<p>12.5%</p>	<p>36.8%</p>	<p>15.2%</p>
<p>One or more household members currently ...</p> <p>3. <u>Lack of health insurance coverage</u> or a “medical card”</p>	<p>10.4%</p>	<p>73.7%</p>	<p>17.6%</p>
<p>Overall percentage of “Barrier Households” i.e., the household has Barrier 1 and/or Barrier 2 and/or Barrier 3.</p>	<p>31.3%</p>	<p>100.0%</p>	<p>39.1%</p>

Vernon Parish: Demographic Distribution of Respondents in Households with Healthcare Access Barriers

(Totals in each category may add to less than 100% due to refused answers; employment status category may add to more than 100% due to multiple employments per respondent.)

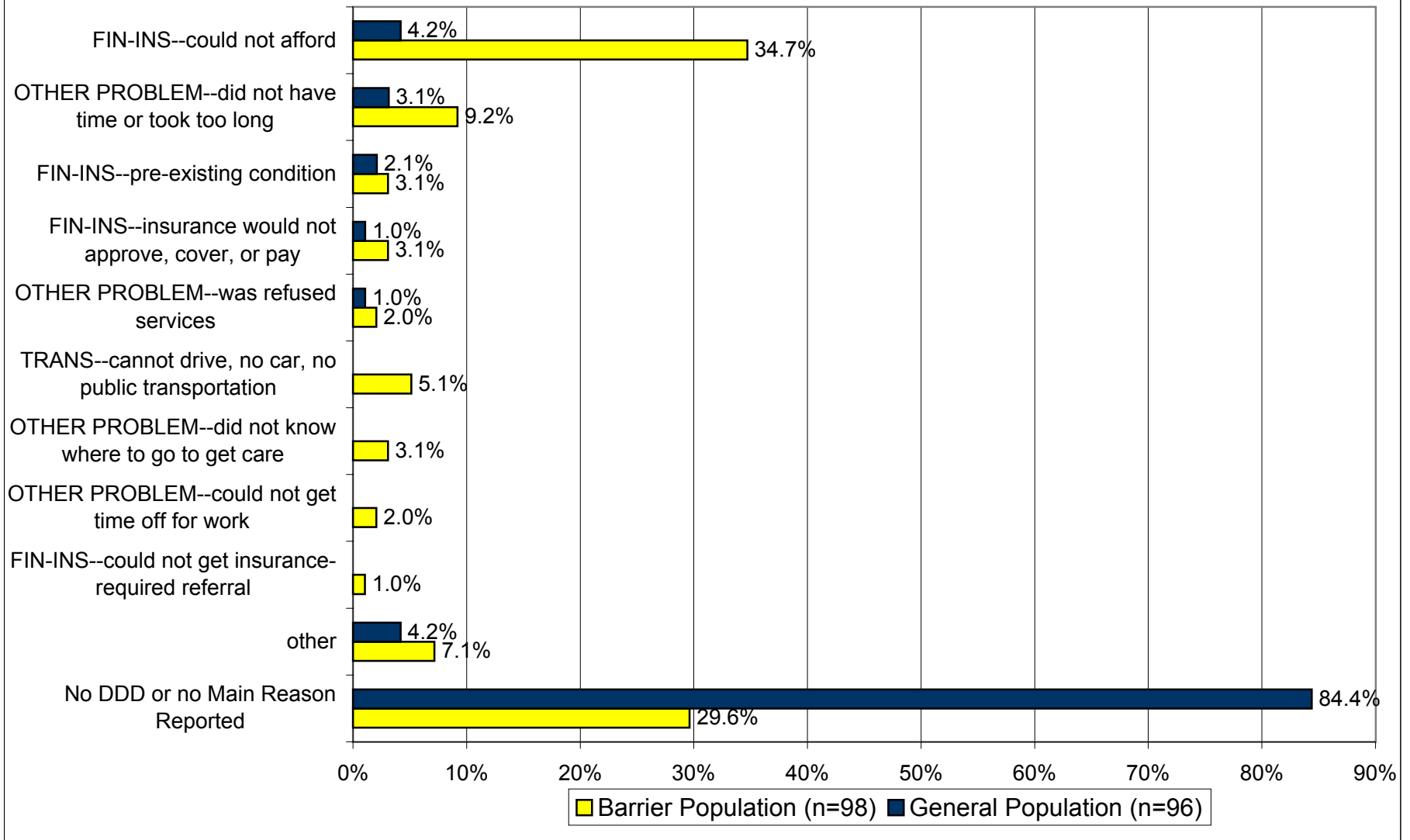
DEMOGRAPHIC CATEGORIES	BARRIER		
	Had Difficulty Obtaining, Delayed, or Did not Receive Needed Care, in last 12 months (72 cases)	Had Problems Obtaining Prescribed Medications, in last 12 months (37 cases)	Lack Health Insurance, currently (60 cases)
Age			
18-29	37.5%	24.3%	36.7%
30-39	22.2%	24.3%	31.6%
40-49	19.5%	24.4%	18.4%
50-59	15.2%	18.9%	10.0%
60-69	5.6%	5.4%	3.3%
70-79	0.0%	2.7%	0.0%
80+	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Race			
White – Caucasian	81.9%	83.8%	81.7%
Black – African-American	9.7%	8.1%	8.3%
American Indian, Alaskan native	2.8%	2.7%	3.3%
Other or multi-cultural	5.6%	5.4%	6.7%
Spanish or Hispanic Origin			
Yes	2.8%	2.7%	8.3%
No	95.8%	97.3%	90.0%
Martial Status			
Married	58.3%	51.4%	50.0%
Single (widowed, divorced, separated, never married)	41.7%	48.6%	50.0%
Highest Grade or Year of School Completed			
Grades 1-8	2.8%	8.1%	6.7%
Grades 9-11	26.4%	32.4%	36.7%
Grades 12 or GED (graduated high school)	37.5%	35.1%	38.3%
College 1-3 years	27.8%	24.3%	13.3%
College 4 years or more (college graduate)	5.6%	0.0%	5.0%

Current Employment Status			
Employed Full-Time for Wages Outside the Home	26.4%	27.0%	20.0%
Employed Part-Time for wages Outside the Home	6.9%	8.1%	3.3%
Self-Employed	1.4%	0.0%	3.3%
Out or Work for More than 1 Year	11.1%	16.2%	13.3%
Out or Work for Less than 1 Year	19.4%	21.6%	25.0%
Homemaker	26.4%	18.9%	25.0%
Student	6.9%	2.7%	5.0%
Retired	5.6%	8.1%	3.3%
Unable to Work	11.1%	16.2%	15.0%
Annual Household Income, from all sources			
Less than \$10,000	40.3%	40.5%	46.7%
Between \$10,000 and \$15,000	20.8%	18.9%	25.0%
Between \$15,000 and \$20,000	4.2%	10.8%	5.0%
Between \$20,000 and \$25,000	5.6%	2.7%	3.3%
Between \$25,000 and \$35,000	13.9%	13.5%	8.3%
Between \$35,000 and \$50,000	6.9%	2.7%	3.3%
Between \$50,000 and \$75,000	4.2%	2.7%	1.7%
More than \$75,000	1.4%	2.7%	0.0%

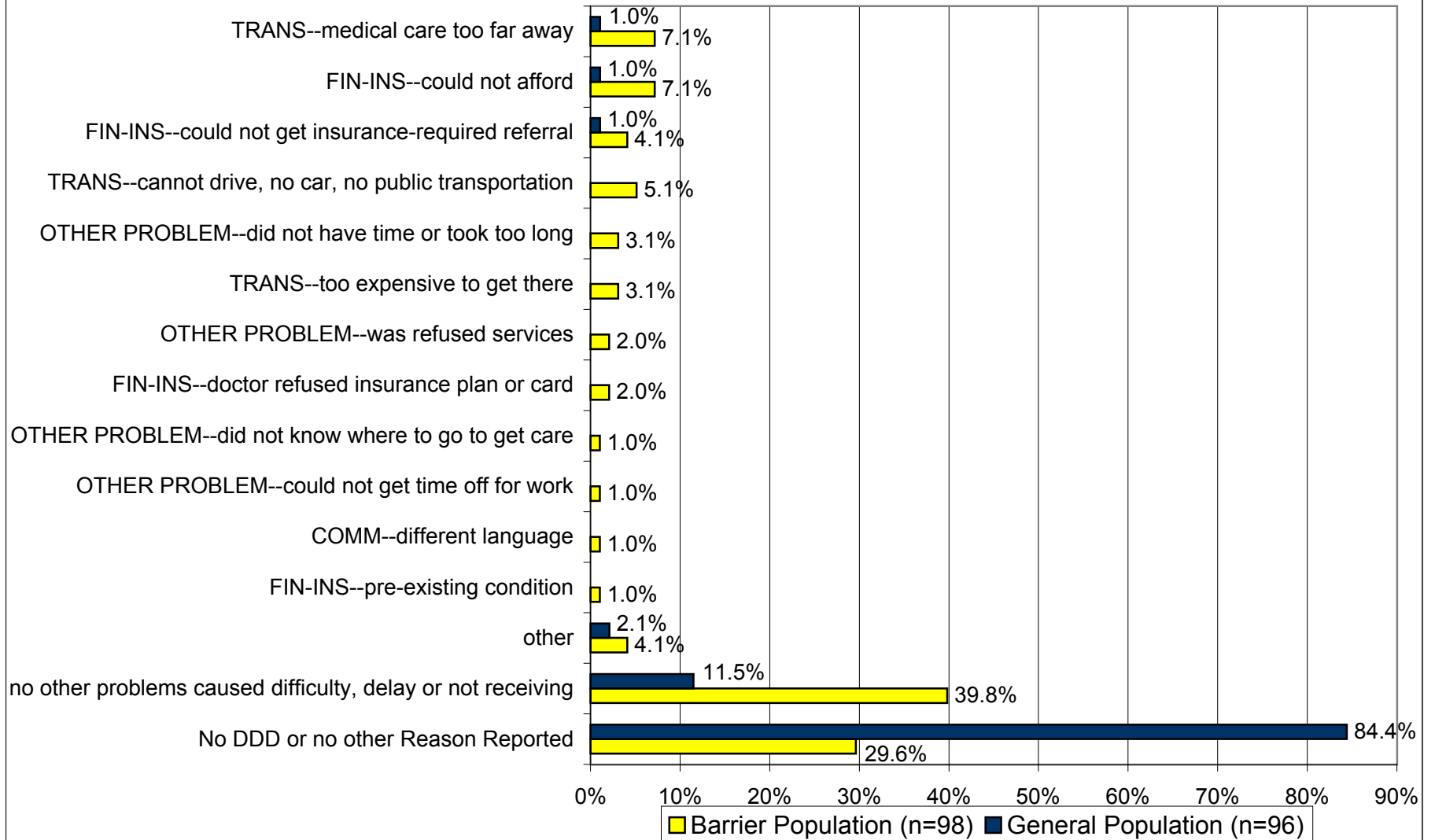
Details from the *Louisiana HABITS* “Barriers Sequence” of questions are given in the next series of charts, comparing responses of the 101 households in the General Population and the 96 households in the Barrier Population:

Question Identifier	Full Text of the Question
<i>AC25-A</i>	<i>What was the MAIN reason that caused family members' difficulty, delay, or not receiving needed health care?</i>
<i>AC26</i>	<i>Were there OTHER problems?</i>
<i>Medicate</i>	<i>Was there a time during the last 12 months when you were unable to get medications which were prescribed for you by a doctor? If so, what were the reasons you could not?</i>
<i>AM23</i>	<i>What kind of problems do you have getting to or from the doctor?</i>
<i>Ins1</i>	<i>"LaCHIP" is the Louisiana Children's Health Insurance Program through which children in low income families can receive health insurance coverage. At this point in time, how many children in your household are covered on a "medical card" from the LaCHIP program?</i>
<i>Ins2</i>	<i>"Medicaid" is a coverage plan for people with very low or no income. At this point in time, how many family members in your household are covered on a "medical card" from the Louisiana Medicaid program?</i>
<i>Ins3</i>	<i>"Medicare" is a coverage plan for people 65 or over and for certain disabled people. At this point in time, how many senior or disabled citizens in your household have Medicare from the Federal government?</i>
<i>Ins3A</i>	<i>"Medicare" has two parts: Part A is automatic and covers hospitalization while Part B is optional and covers doctors' services and other things. At this point in time, how many senior or disabled citizens in your household have the optional Part B coverage for doctors' services?</i>
<i>Ins3B</i>	<i>Some people who have Medicare purchase supplemental insurance to cover things that Medicare doesn't. This insurance is often called MediGap. At this point in time, how many senior or disabled citizens in your household have Medicare supplement coverage?</i>
<i>Ins4</i>	<i>At this point in time, how many family members in your household have health coverage through the military, CHAMPUS, TriCare, or the VA (that is, the Veterans Administration)?</i>
<i>Ins5</i>	<i>At this point in time, how many family members in your household have health coverage through the Indian Health Service?</i>
<i>Ins6</i>	<i>At this point in time, how many family members in your household have health insurance through a plan sponsored by an employer?</i>
<i>Ins7</i>	<i>How many family members in your household have health insurance which they purchase on their own either because they are self-employed or because their employer does not offer coverage?</i>
<i>Ins8</i>	<i>How many family members in your household have NO "medical card" or other form of health insurance?</i>
<i>M41</i>	<i>What is the MAIN reason that family members in your household are now without healthcare coverage?</i>
<i>S25</i>	<i>About how long has it been since family members in your household had health care coverage?</i>

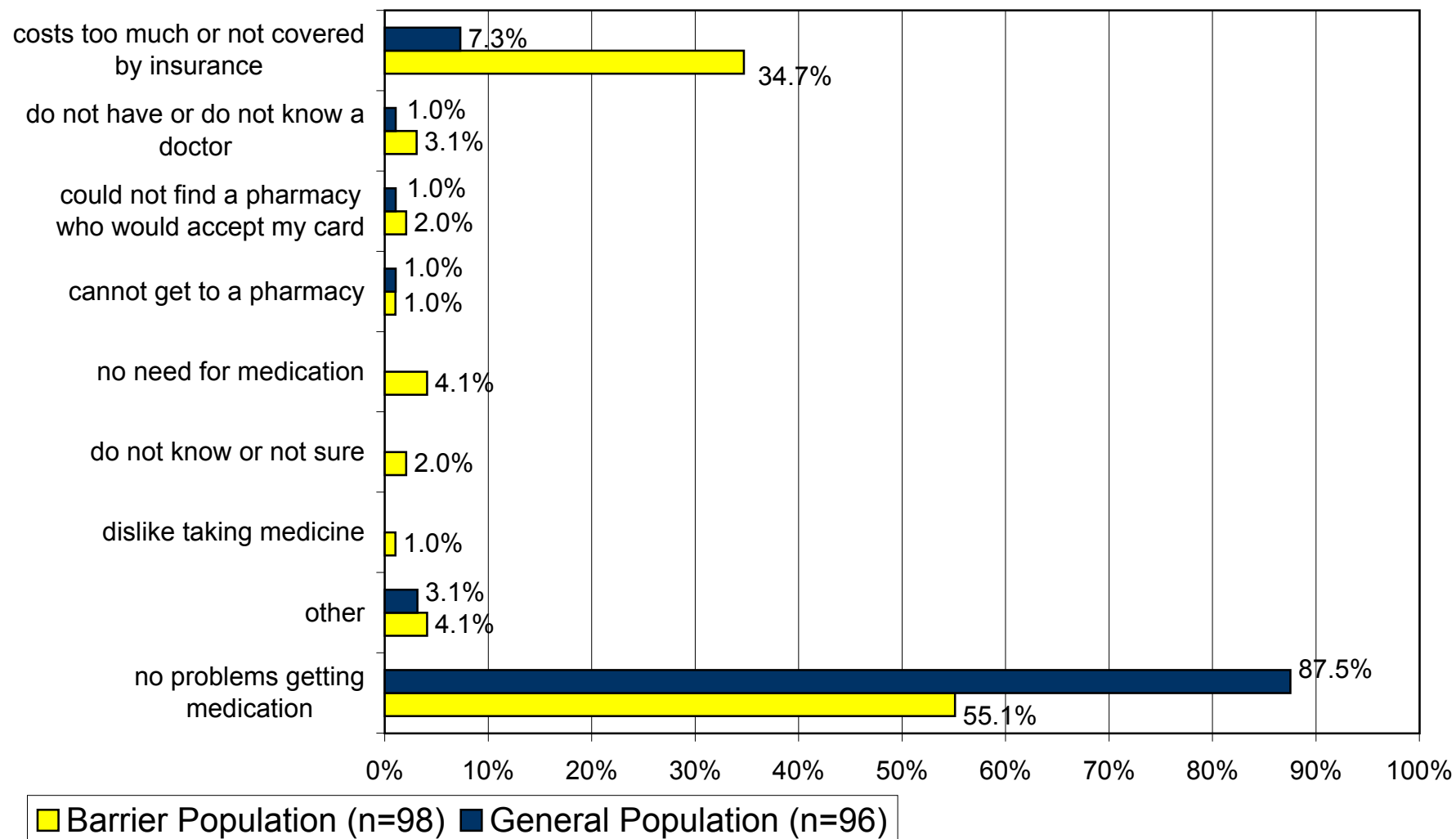
AC25-A: Main reason causing "Difficulty" in obtaining care, "Delayed" obtaining care, or "Did not Receive" needed care



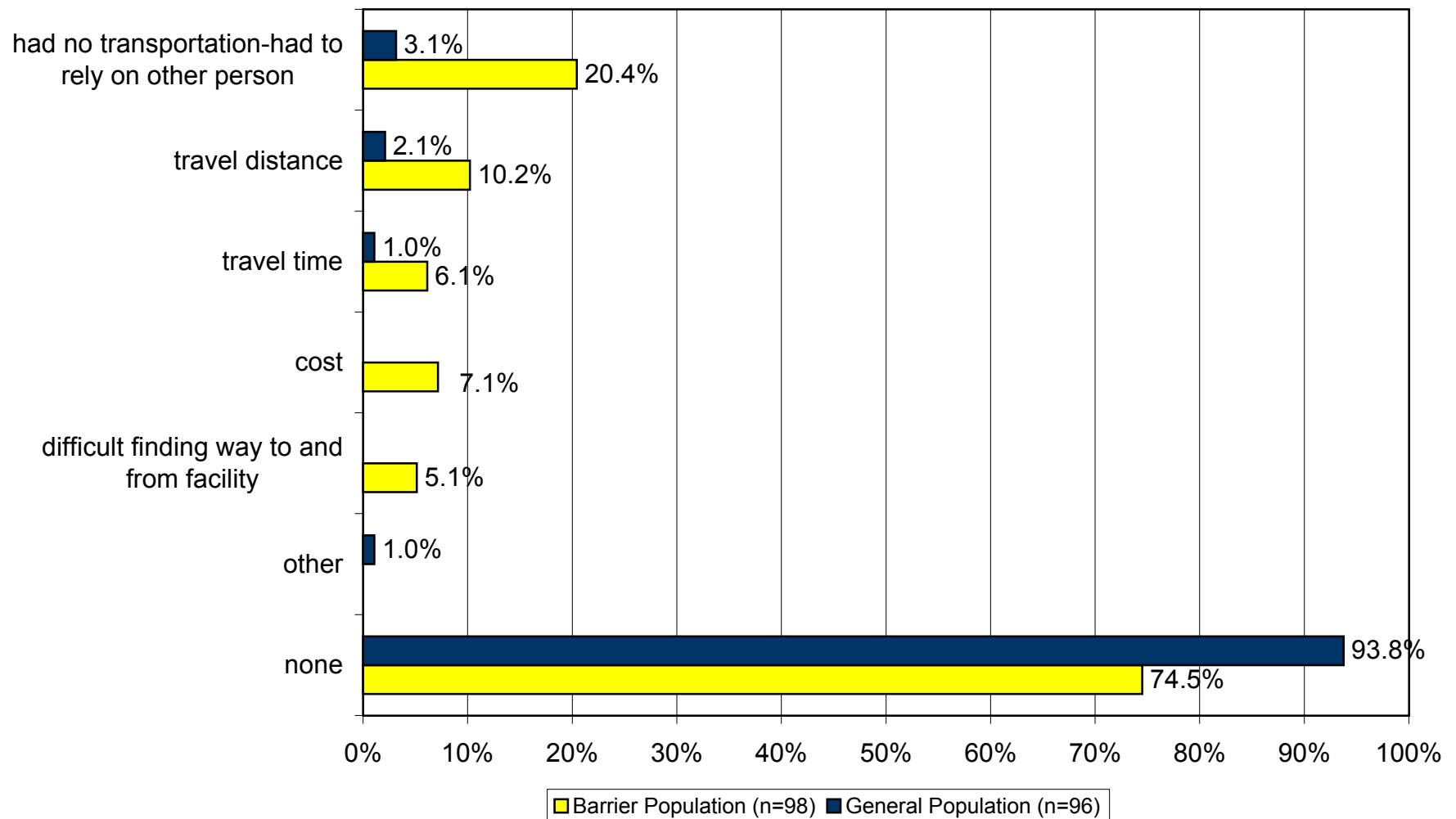
AC26: Other problems causing "Difficulty" in obtaining care, "Delayed" obtaining care, or "Did not Receive" needed care



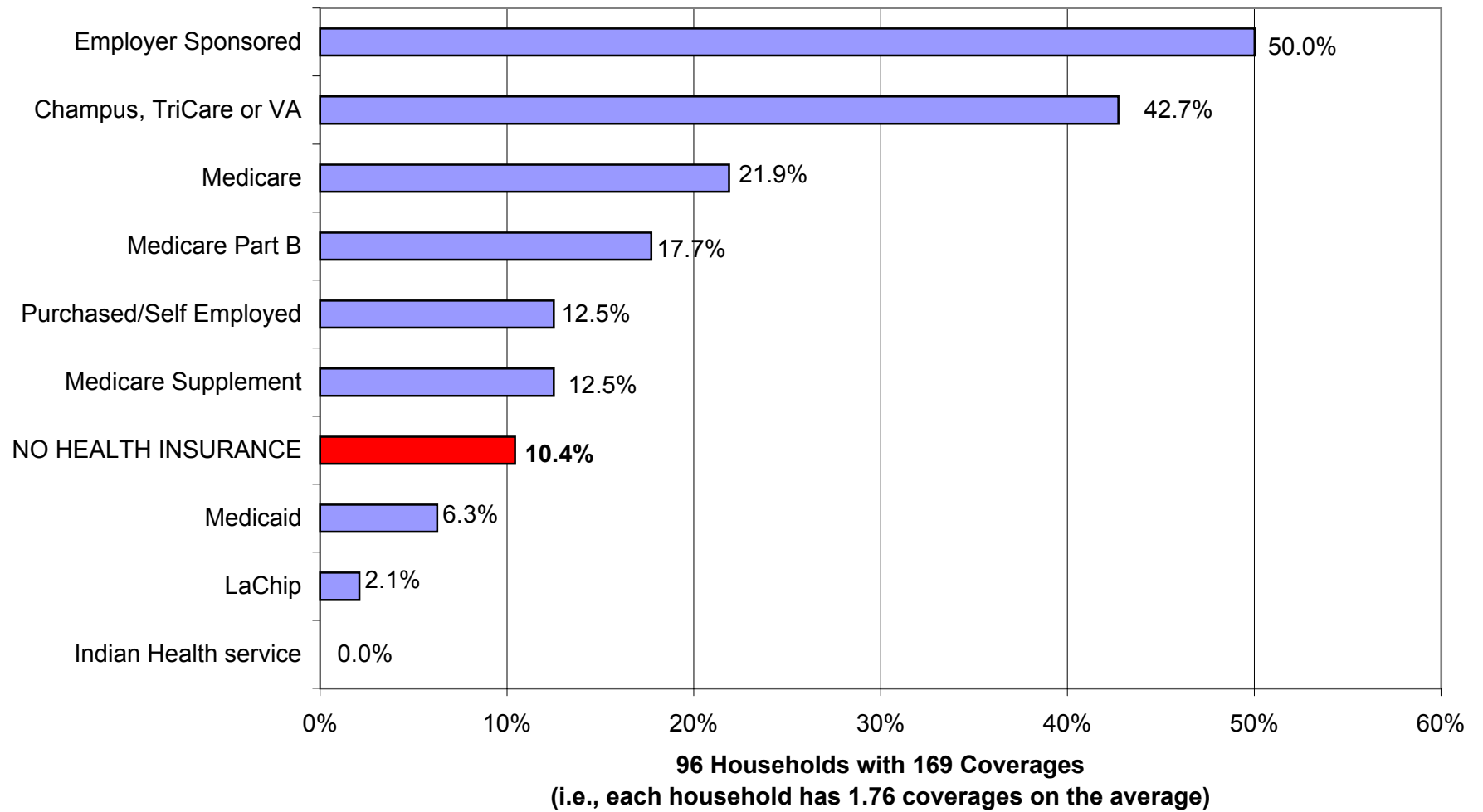
Medicate: Problems with Obtaining Prescribed Medication



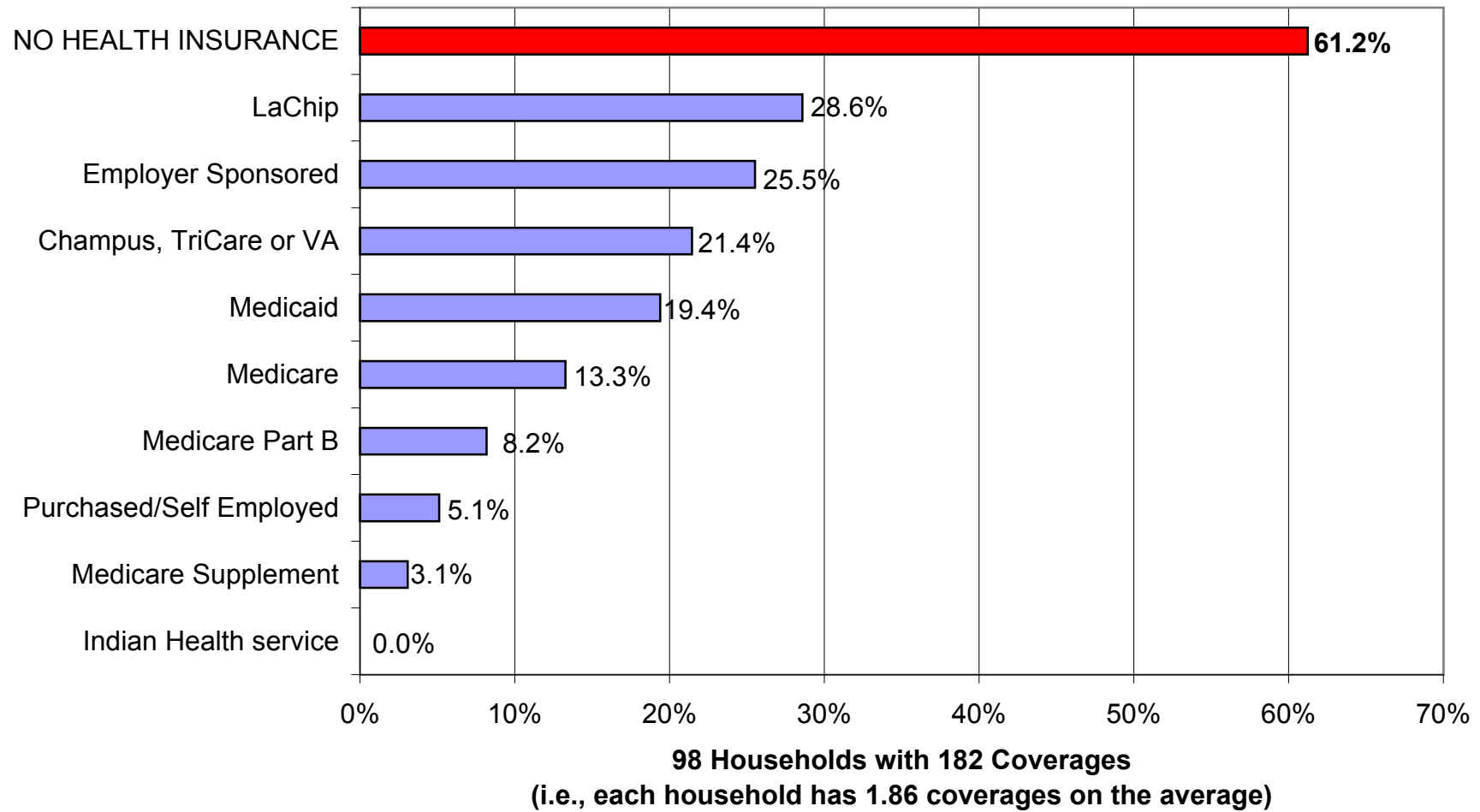
AM23: Problems Getting To and From the Doctor



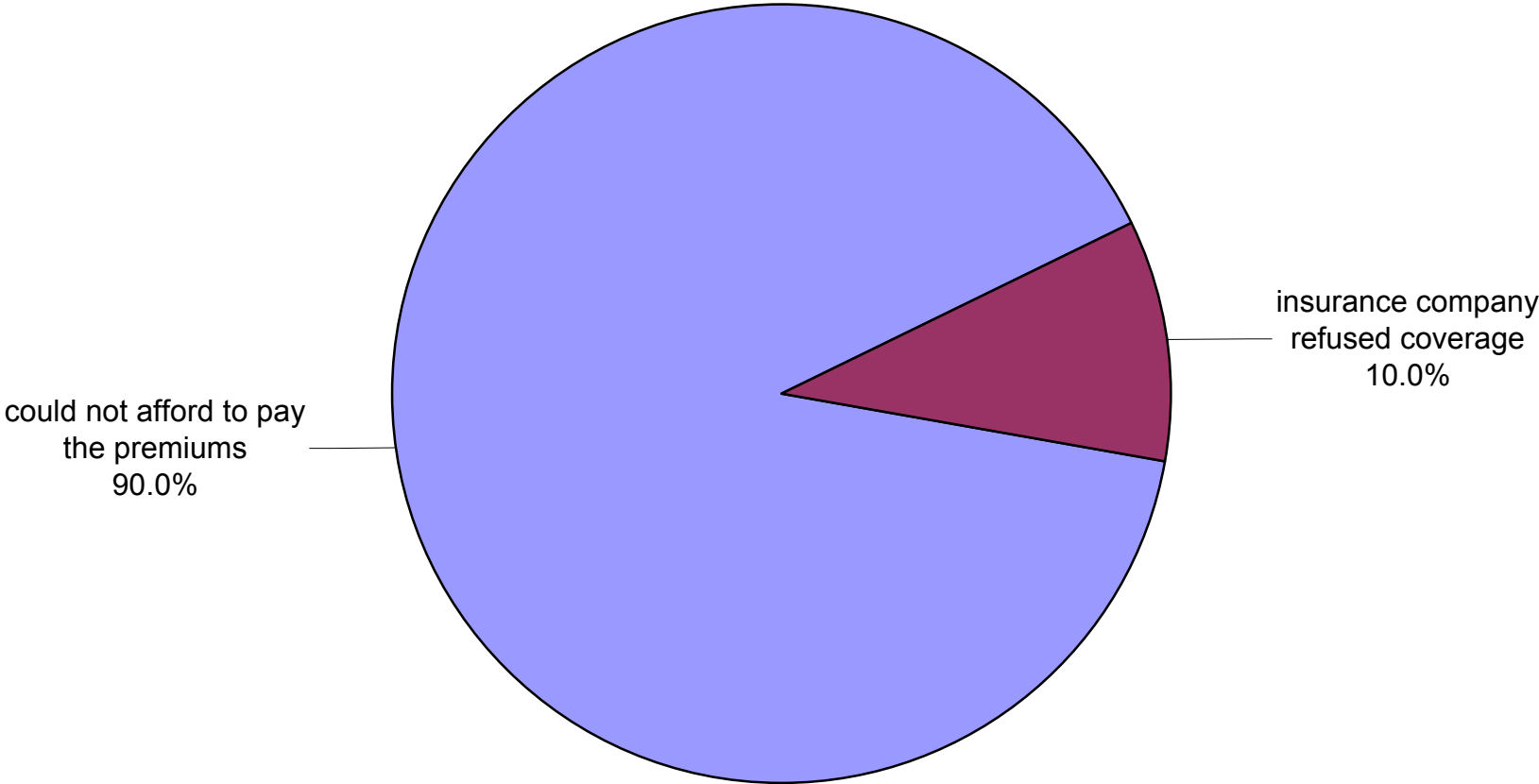
Ins1-Ins8: Percentage of "General Population" households having at least one person with listed health coverages



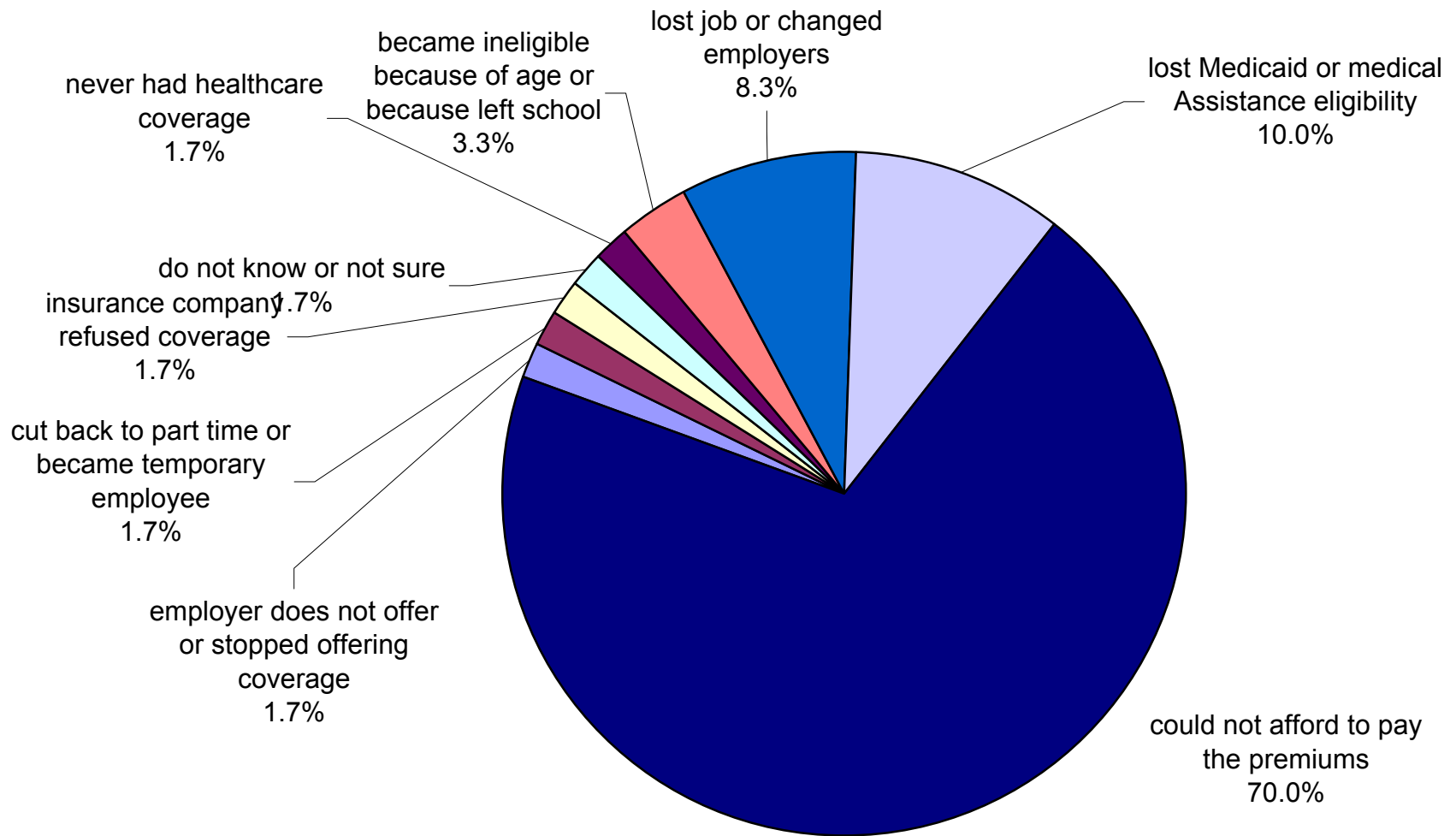
Ins1-Ins8: Percentage of "Barrier Population" households having at least one person with listed health coverages



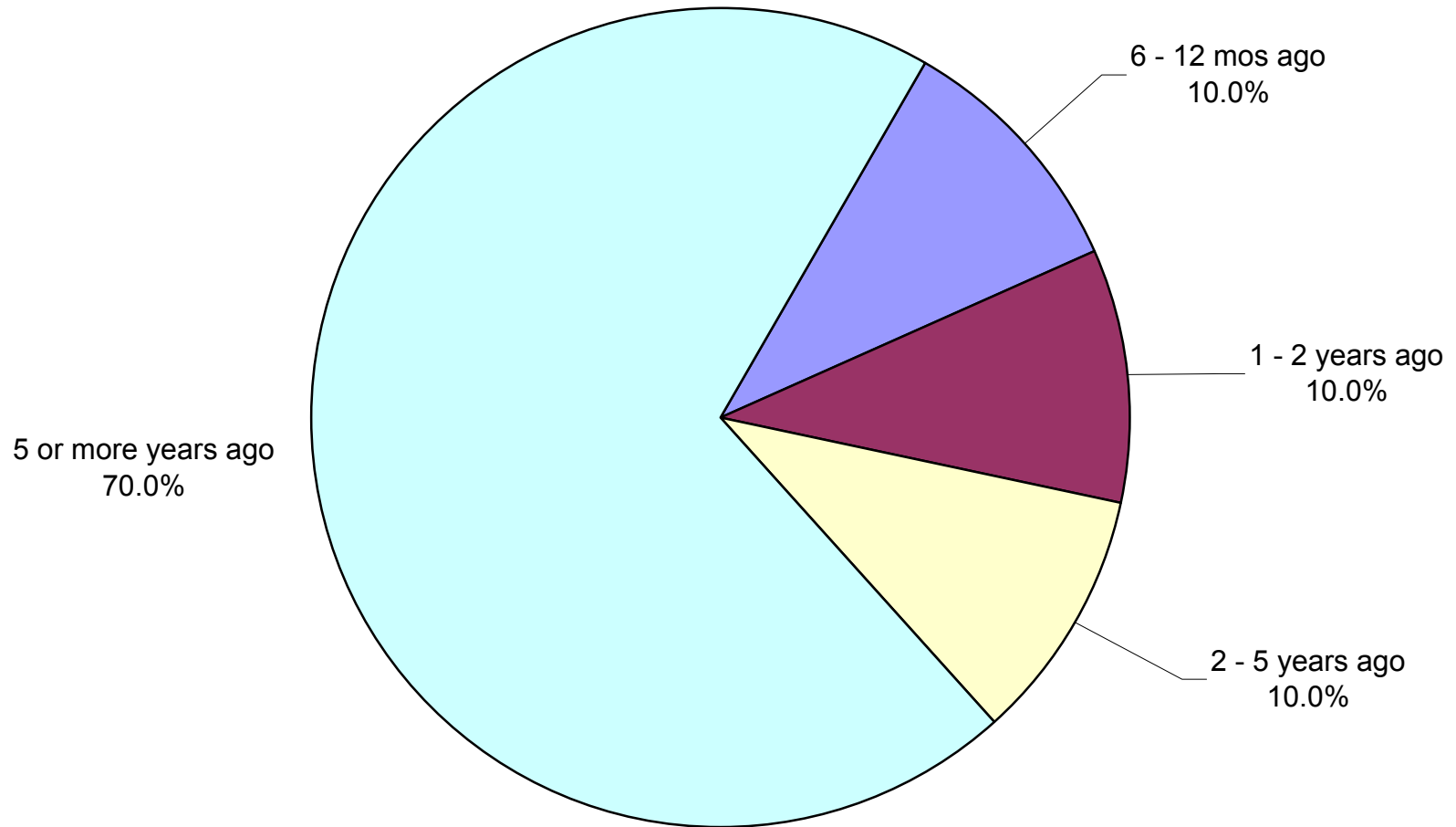
M41: Main Reason "General Population" family members are without coverage (based on 10 households without coverage)



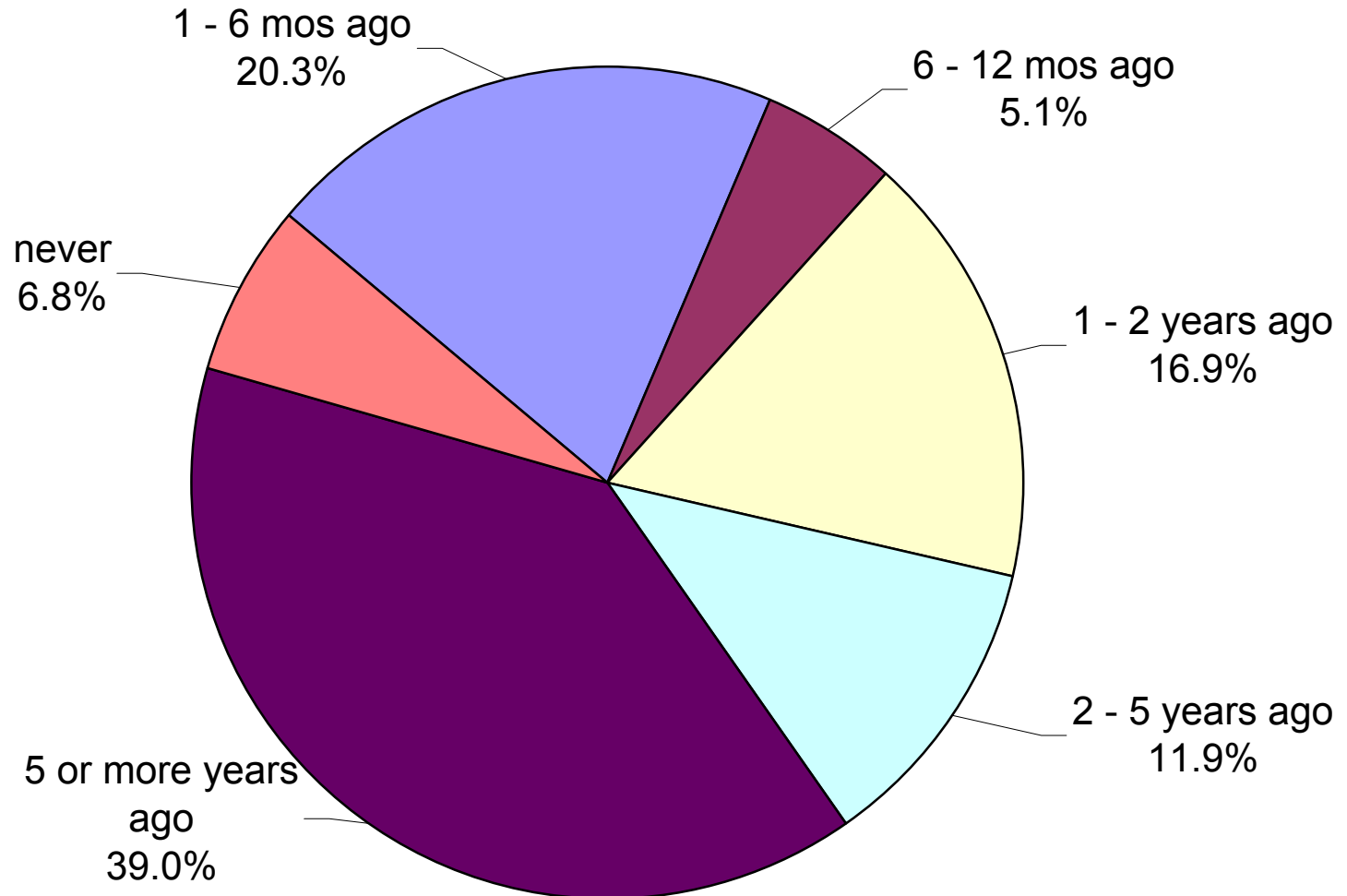
M41: Main Reason "Barrier Population" family members are without coverage (based on 60 households without coverage)



**S25: How long since "General Population family members
had healthcare coverage?
(based on 10 households without coverage)**



**S25: How long since "Barrier Population" family members had healthcare coverage?
(based on 60 households without coverage)**



Louisiana HABITS Care Source Sequence

The “Care Source Sequence” of questions in the *Louisiana HABITS* interview included questions about the source of care utilized by family members in the household that the respondent was representing.

Question

Identifier

Full Text of the Question

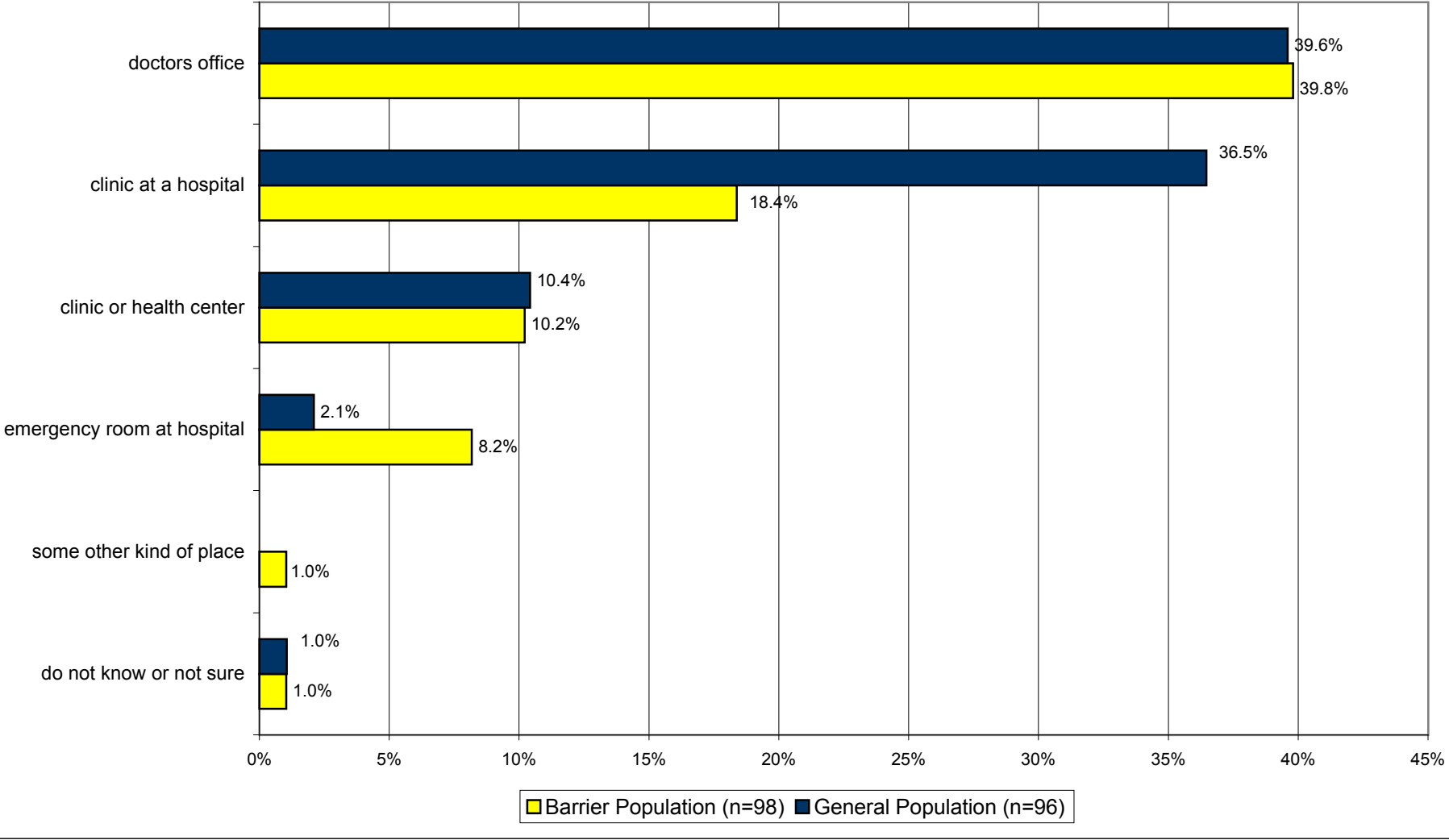
- M44 *If there is ONE PARTICULAR clinic, health center, doctor's office, or other place that the family members in your household usually go to if they are sick or need advice about their health, what kind of a place is that?*
- M45 *Do you have one person you think of as your household's MAIN personal doctor or health care provider?*
- S27 *About how long has it been since the family members in your household last had a checkup, for instance, a physical exam to screen for undetected problems?*

Analysis of responses to question M44 (“place you go most often”) reveals that 73.5% of the General Population go most often to a provider location within Vernon Parish while 24.1% travel to a provider location outside of Vernon Parish. These proportions vary somewhat when the no-phone population and the barrier population (and its subgroups) are considered. The total of “within” and “outside” percentages may not add to 100% if the “place gone most often” response could not be matched to a healthcare provider known to this Study.

Population (# responses / # interviews)	“Place gone most often for healthcare” is within Vernon Parish	“Place gone most often for healthcare” is outside of Vernon Parish
General Population (83 / 96)	73.5%	24.1%
No-Phone Population (12 / 19)	91.7%	8.3%
Barrier Population (75 / 98)	77.3%	22.7%
DDD Population (54 / 72)	79.6%	20.4%
MedsProb Population (32 / 37)	78.1%	21.9%
No-Insurance Population (43 / 60)	69.8%	30.2%

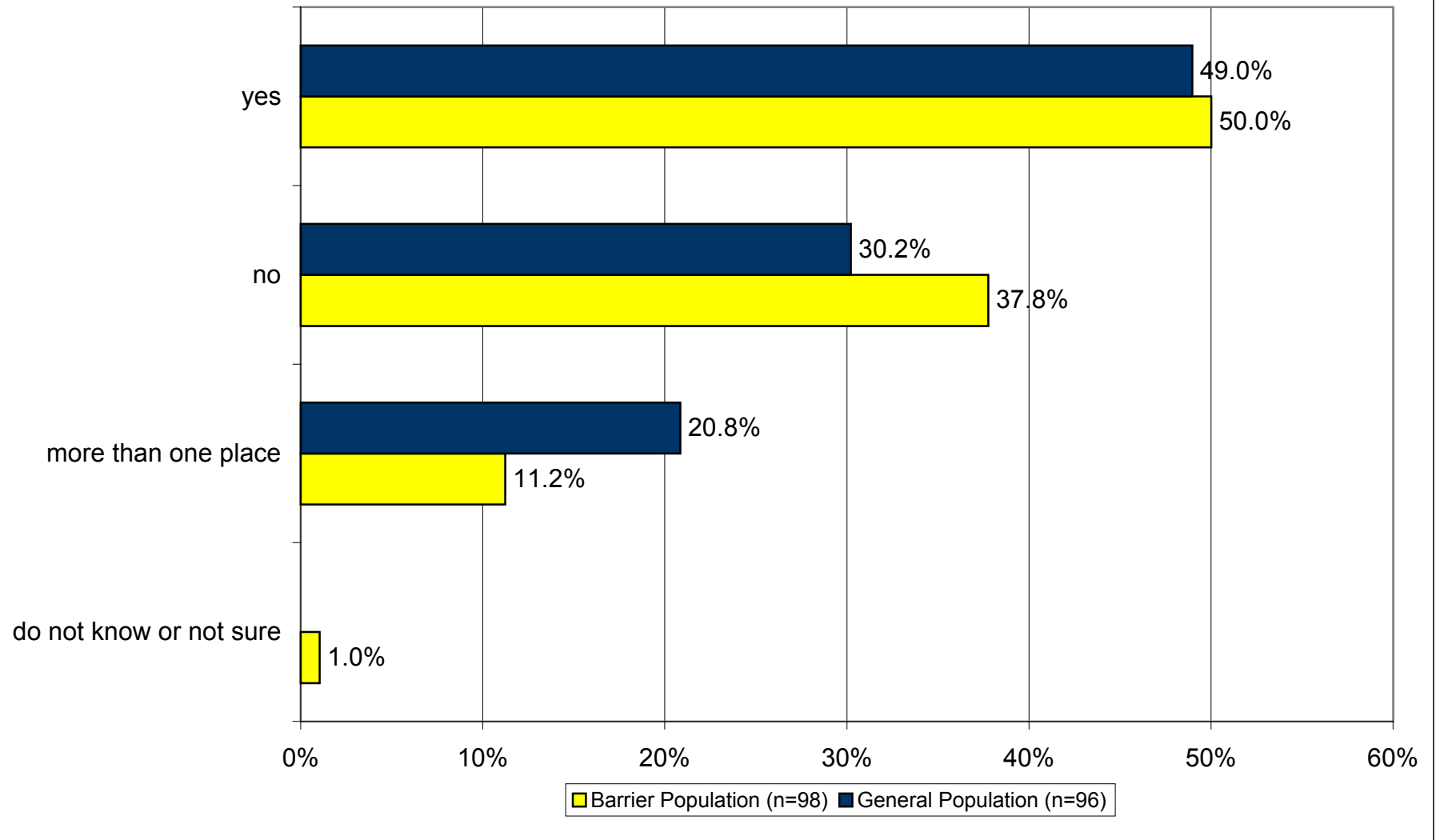
The series of graphs of the following pages depict responses of the General Population and the Barrier Population to questions in the *Louisiana HABITS* Care Source Sequence.

M44: Place that family members go most often for healthcare

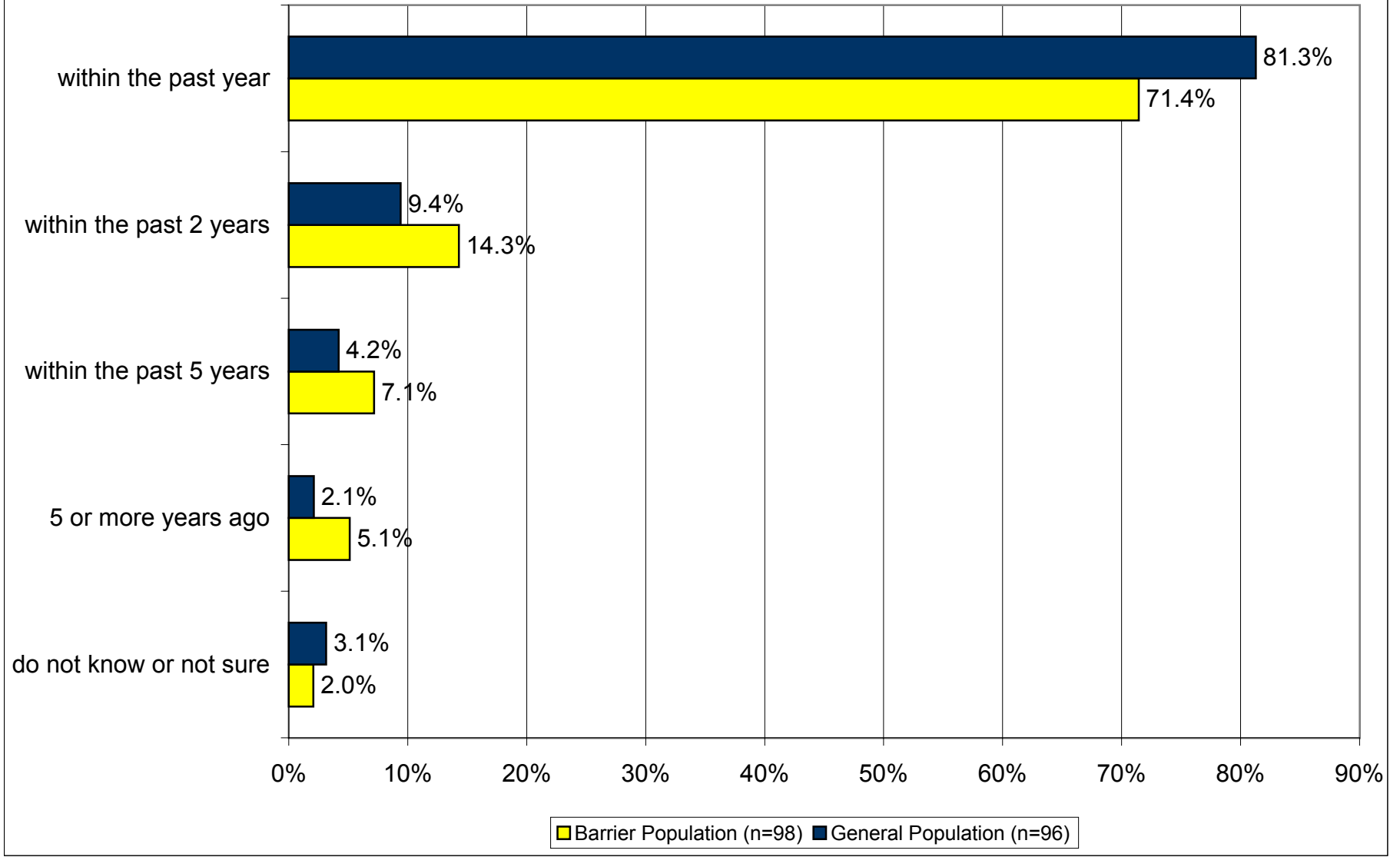


Source: Vernon Parish HABITS 2001-2002

M45: Do you have one person you think of as your household's MAIN personal doctor or healthcare provider?



S27: How long since family members' last checkup?



Louisiana HABITS Satisfaction Sequence

The “Satisfaction Sequence” of questions in the *Louisiana HABITS* interview included questions about the convenience of accessing the source of care utilized by family members in the household that the respondent was representing. The responses do not necessarily represent the overall “satisfaction” of the respondents with any particular source of care, but rather represent the overall accessibility of healthcare providers utilized by respondents.

Question

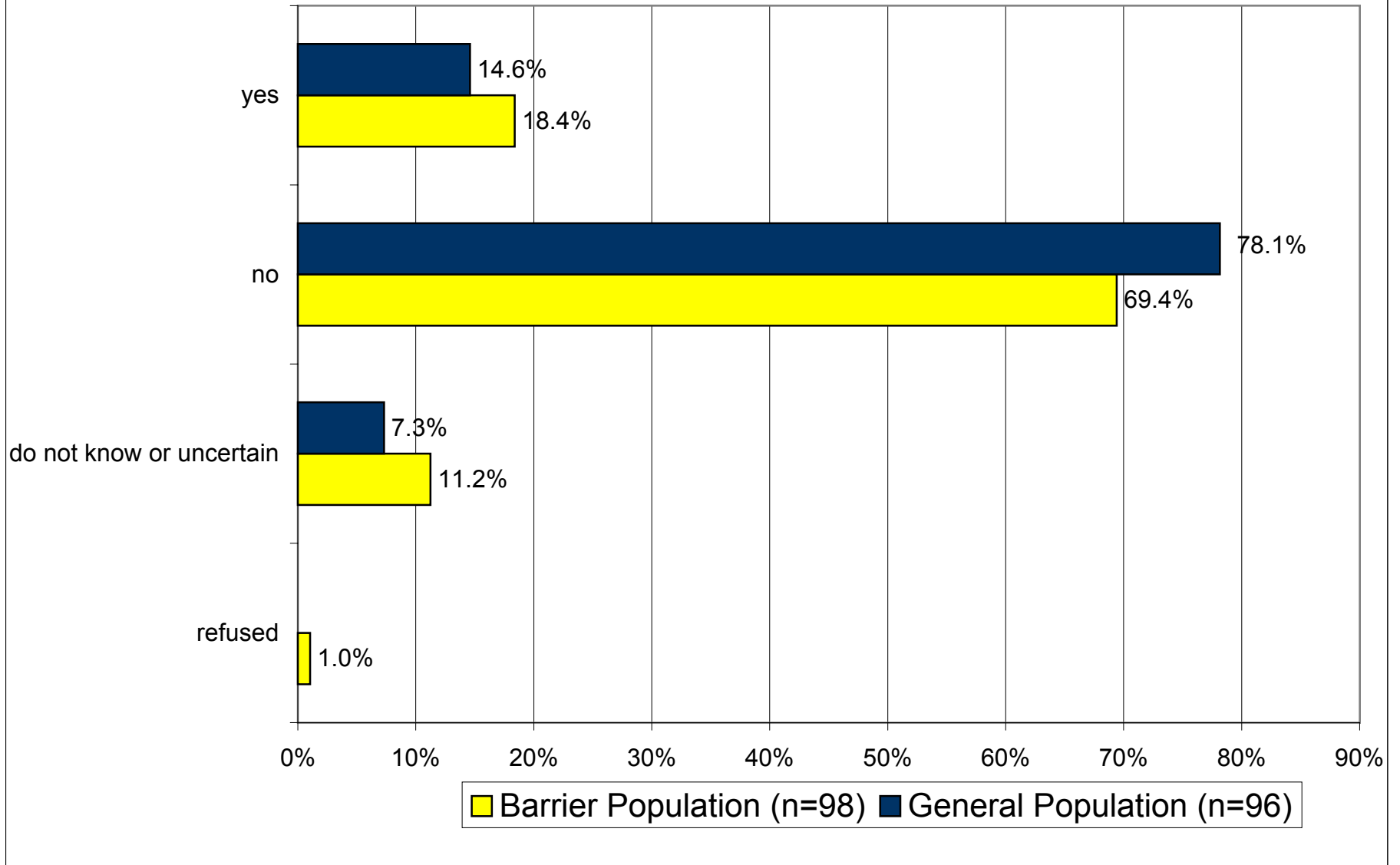
Identifier

Full Text of the Question

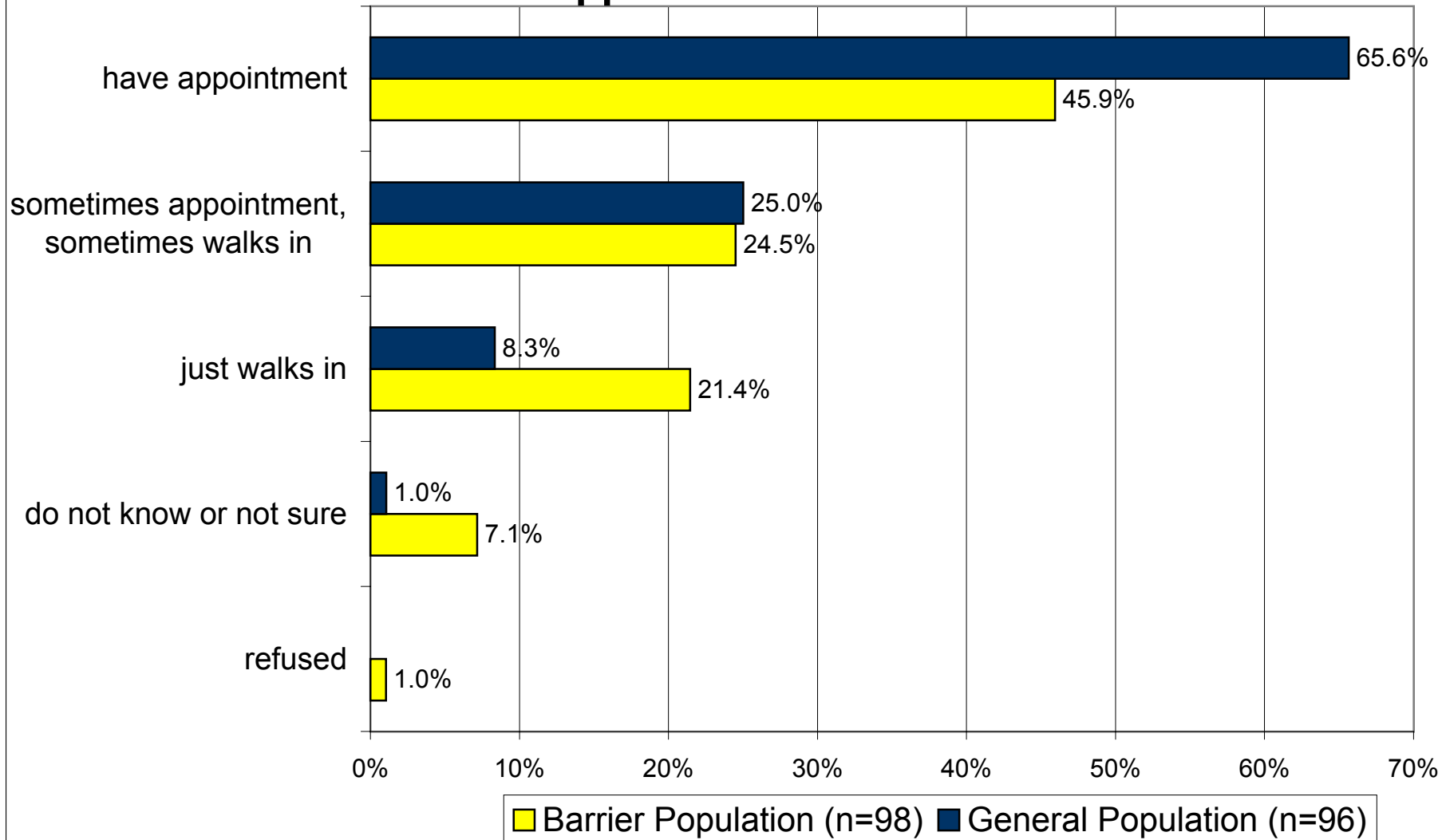
<i>AC15</i>	<i>Does [_____] the place you most often go when you need healthcare] have office hours at night or on weekends?</i>
<i>AC16</i>	<i>When you go there, do you usually have an appointment ahead of time, just walk in, or sometimes have an appointment and sometimes not?</i>
<i>AC17</i>	<i>How difficult is it to get appointments there on short notice, for example, within one or two days?</i>
<i>AC18</i>	<i>After you arrive there, about how long do you usually have to wait before being seen?</i>
<i>AC19</i>	<i>How difficult is it to contact them over the telephone about a health problem?</i>
<i>AC19B</i>	<i>Do they usually ask about prescription medications and treatment other doctors may give you?</i>

The series of graphs of the following pages depict responses of the General Population and the Barrier Population to questions in the *Louisiana HABITS* Satisfaction Sequence.

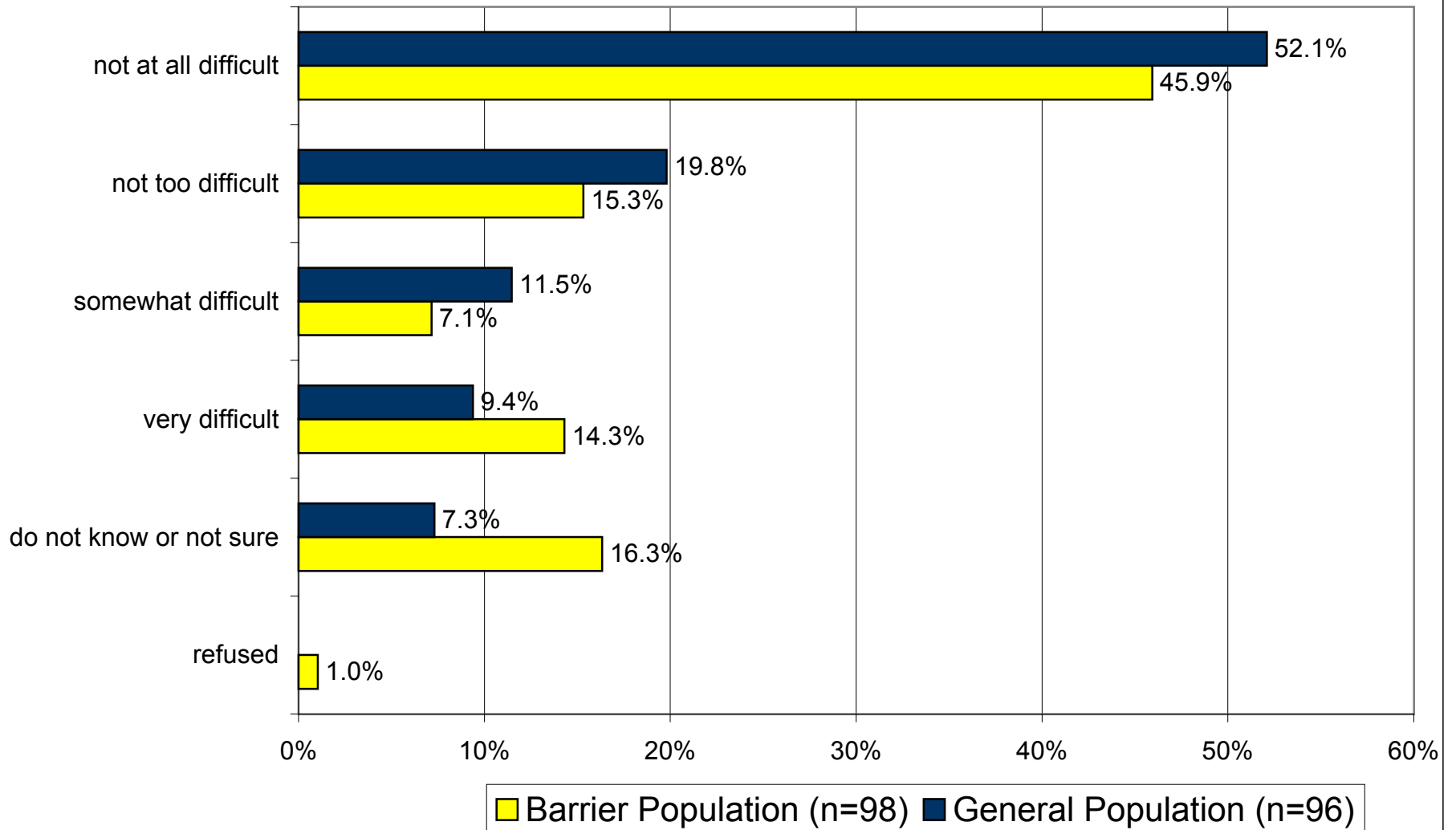
AC15: Office hours nights or weekends?



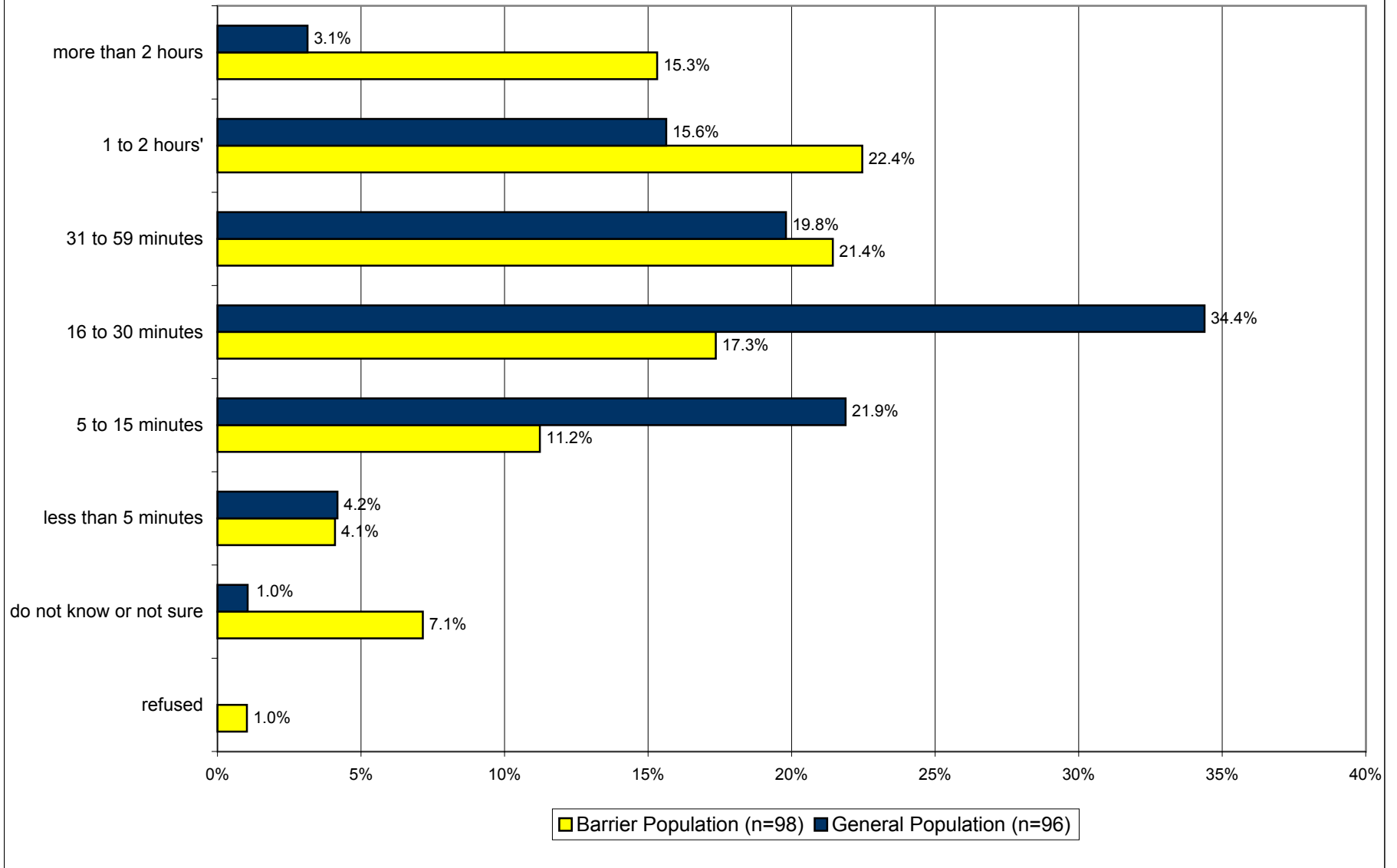
AC16: Appointment or Walk-in?



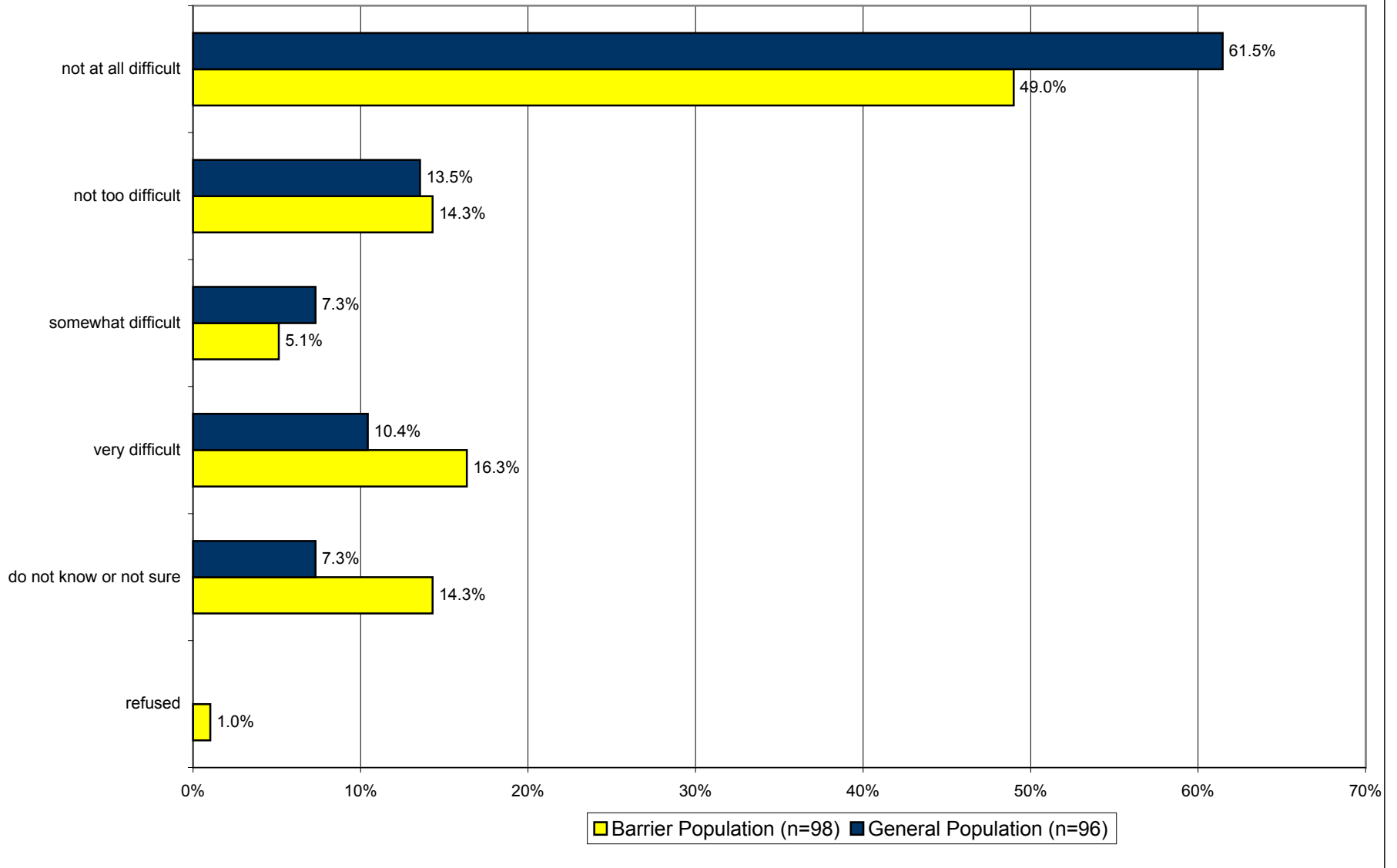
AC17: Is it difficult to get an appointment on short notice?



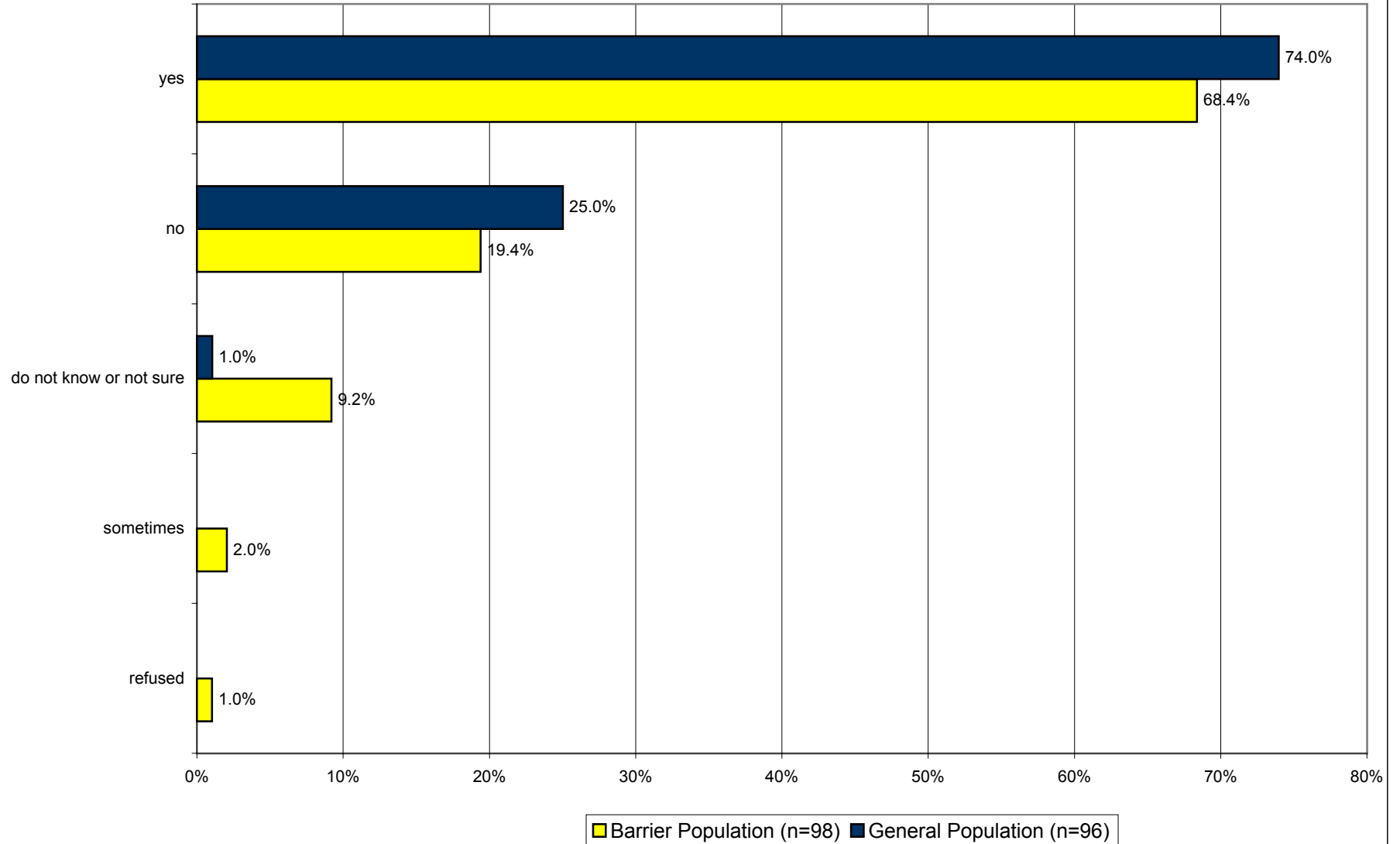
AC18: How long do you wait after you arrive?



AC19: Difficult to contact provider by telephone?



AC19B: Usually asked about medications and treatment other doctors may give you?



Louisiana HABITS Health Status Sequence

The “Health Status Sequence” of questions in the *Louisiana HABITS* interview included questions about the general state of health of the respondent and about the existence of mobility limitations or physician-diagnosed cases of specific named illnesses among family members in the household that the respondent was representing. The named illnesses are in fact five of the leading causes of death in Louisiana according to the 2000 Louisiana Health Report Card, but were not identified as such in that question.

Question

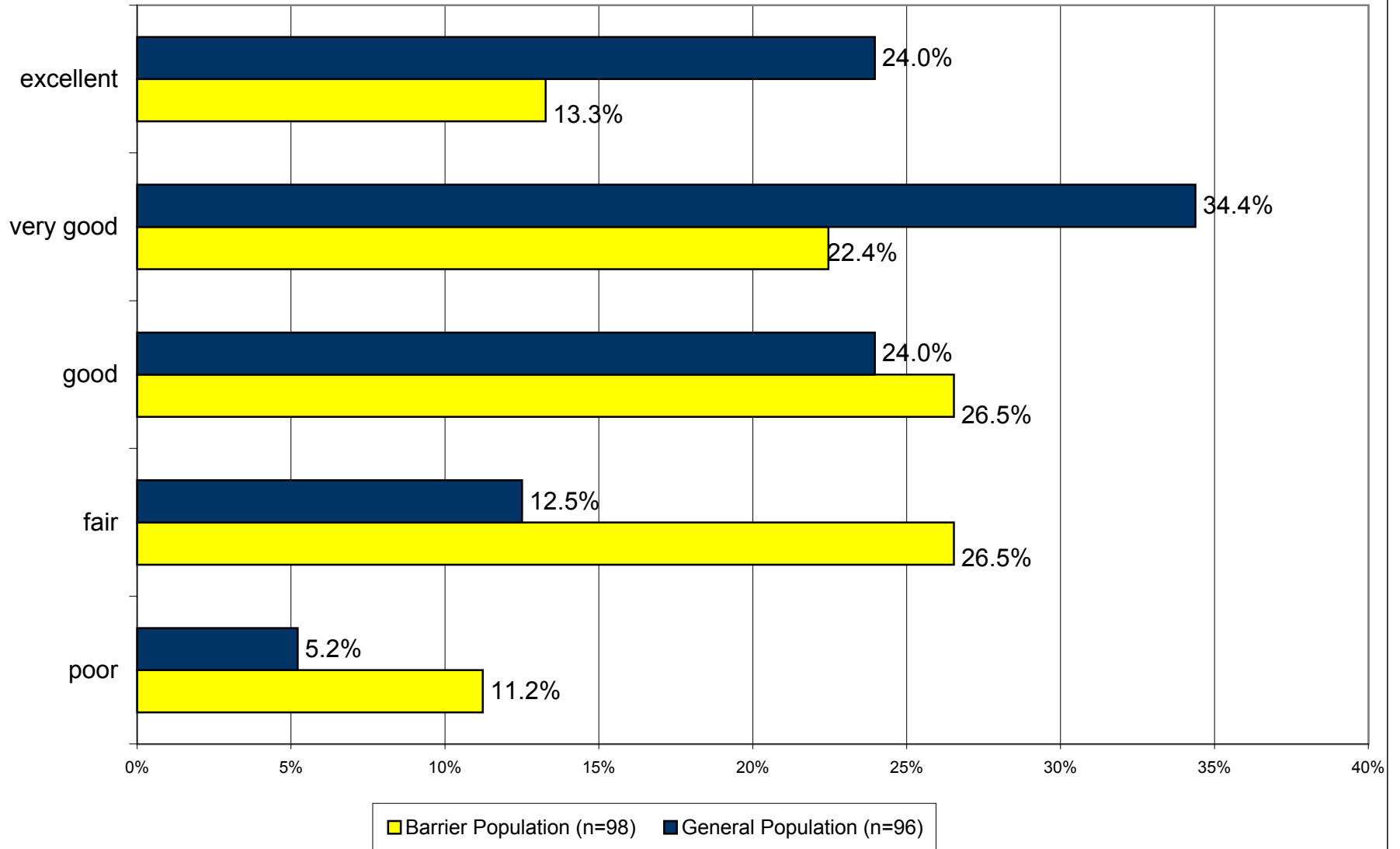
Identifier

Full Text of the Question

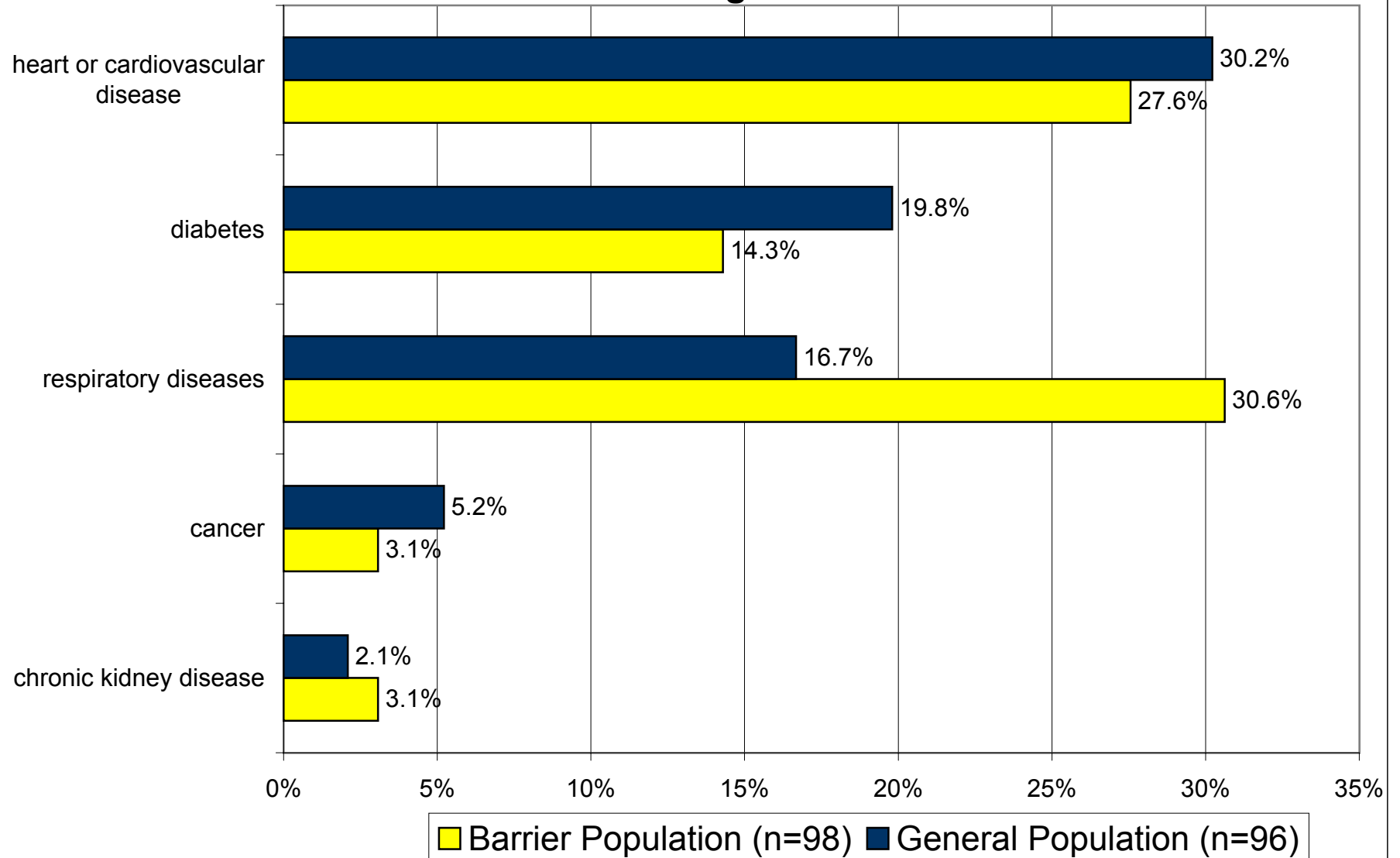
<i>S11</i>	<i>Would you say that in general your health is: Excellent, Very good, Good, Fair, Poor</i>
<i>WhchChrn</i>	<i>Which of the following illnesses has any family member in your household been told by a doctor they currently have? Cancer, Chronic Kidney Disease, Diabetes, Heart or Cardiovascular Disease (e.g., stroke, high BP), Respiratory Diseases (e.g., asthma, COPD, sleep apnea)</i>
<i>MoblLmts</i>	<i>Does any family member in your household have any physical condition that limits their mobility?</i>

The series of graphs of the following pages depict responses of the General Population and the Barrier Population to questions in the *Louisiana HABITS* Health Status Sequence.

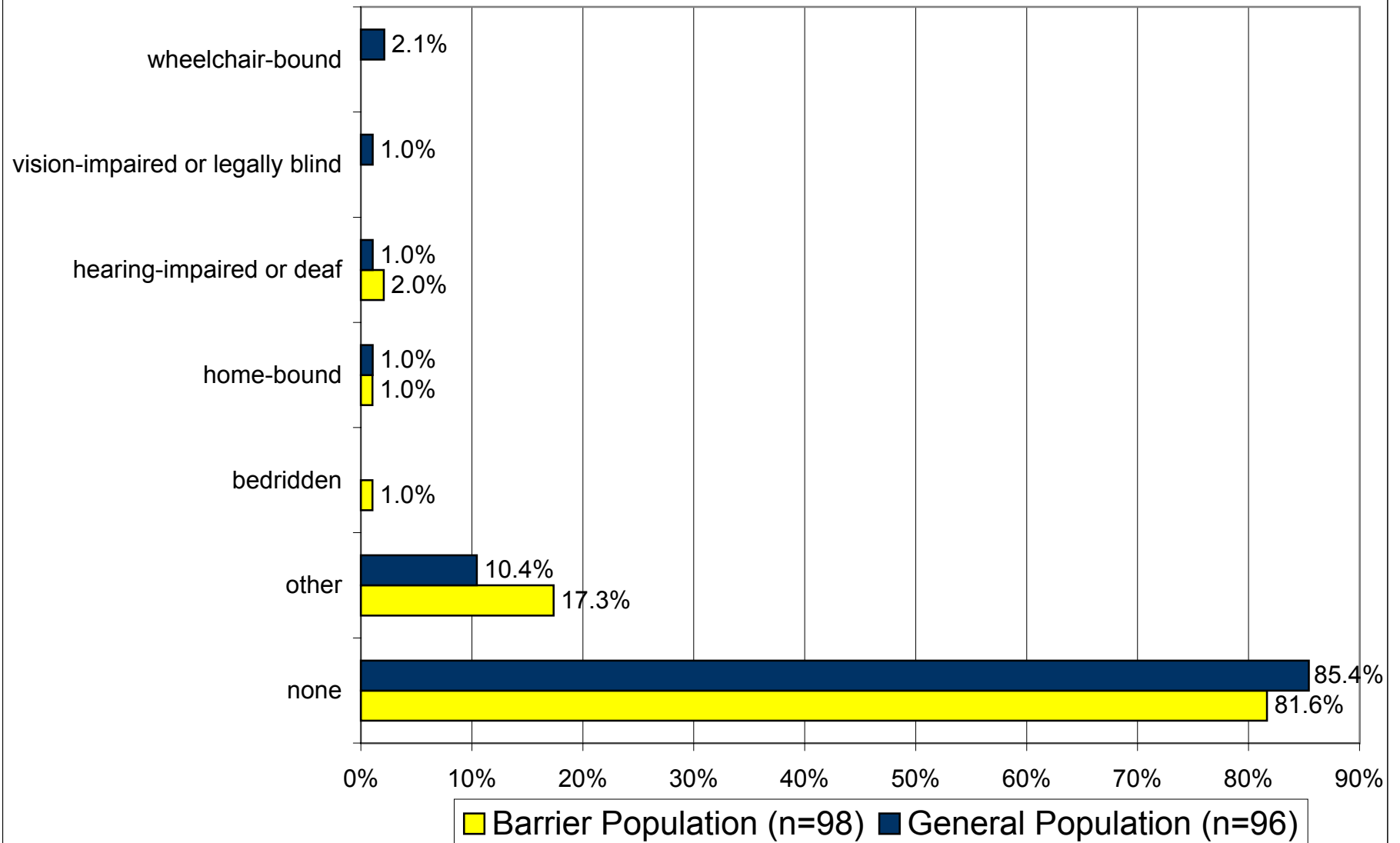
S11: General Health of the Respondents



WhchChr: Illnesses Diagnosed in Household



MobilMts: Family Members' Mobility Limits



Louisiana HABITS Demographics Sequence

The “Demographics Sequence” of questions in the *Louisiana HABITS* interview included questions about the age, race, marital status, education, employment status, and gender of the respondent and about the annual income and parish of the household that the respondent was representing.

Question

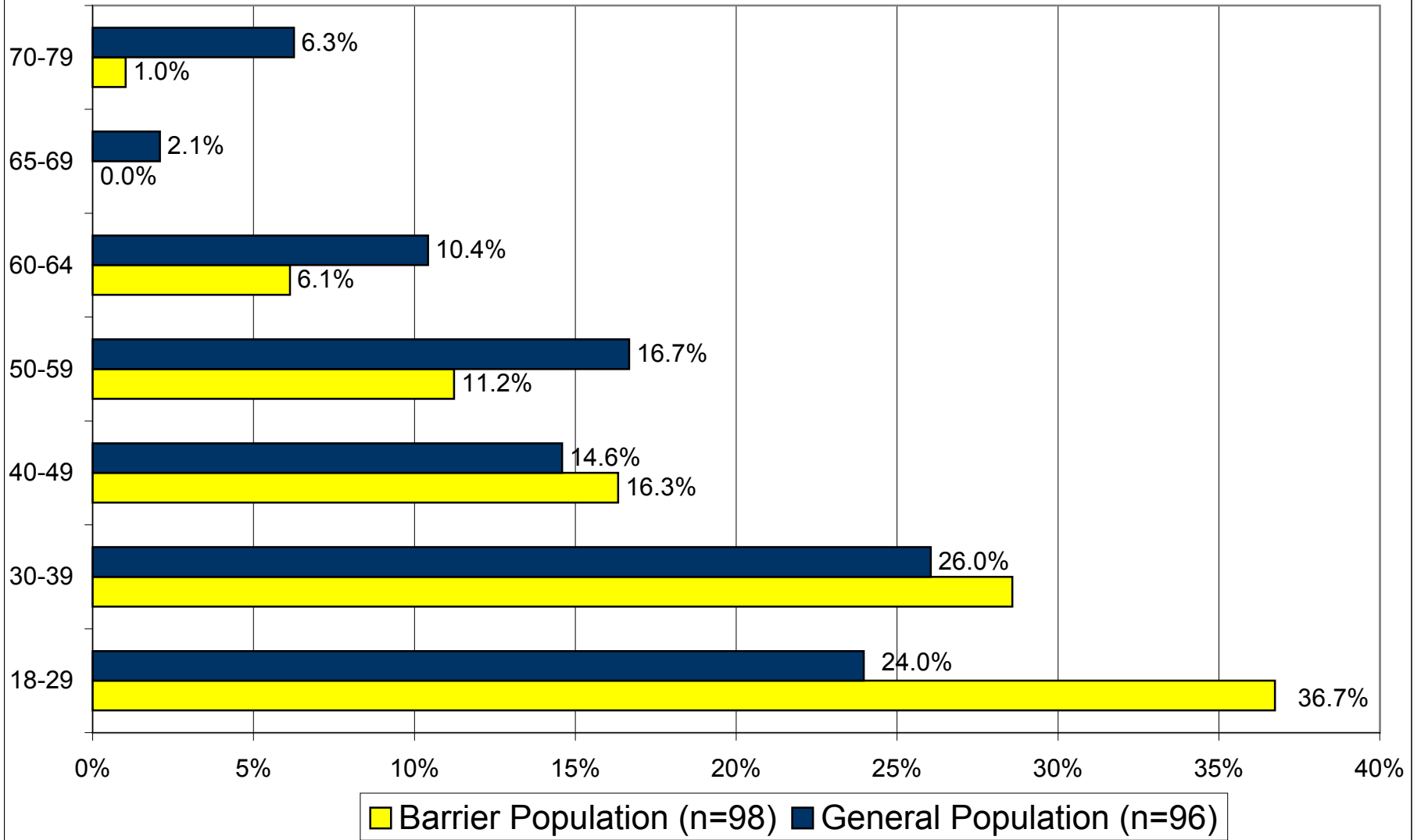
Identifier

Full Text of the Question

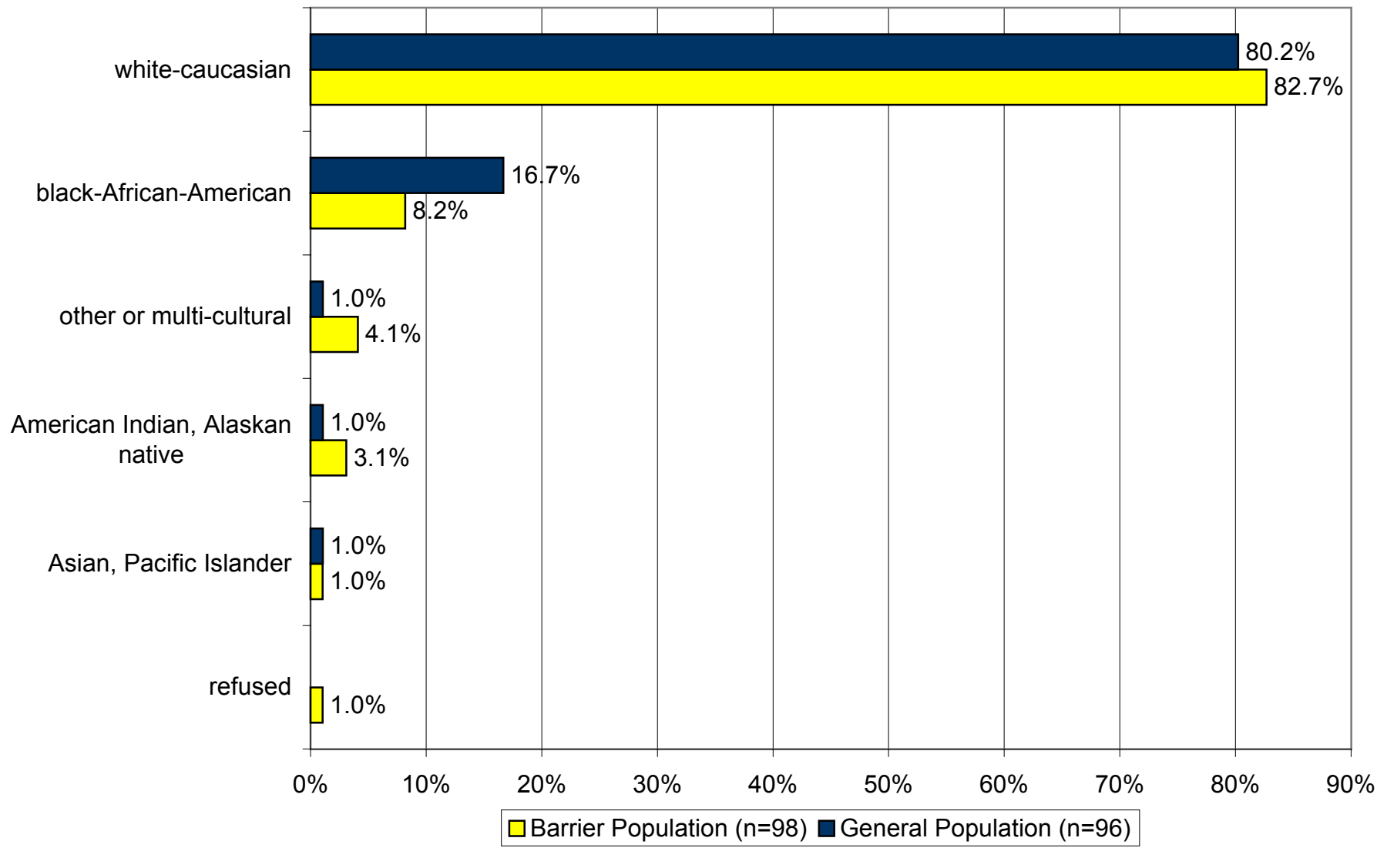
<i>S101</i>	<i>What is your age?</i>
<i>S102</i>	<i>What is your race?</i>
<i>S103</i>	<i>Are you of Spanish or Hispanic origin?</i>
<i>S104</i>	<i>Are you: Married, Single (widowed, divorced, separated, never been married)?</i>
<i>S106</i>	<i>What is the highest grade or year of school you completed?</i>
<i>S107</i>	<i>Are you currently: Employed full-time for wages outside the home, Employed part-time for wages outside the home, Self-employed, Out of work for more than 1 year, Out of work for less than 1 year, Homemaker, Student, Retired, Unable to work</i>
<i>S108</i>	<i>In what range is your annual household income from all sources?</i>
<i>S1018</i>	<i>Gender sex of respondent.</i>

The series of graphs of the following pages depict responses of the General Population and the Barrier Population to questions in the *Louisiana HABITS* Demographics Sequence.

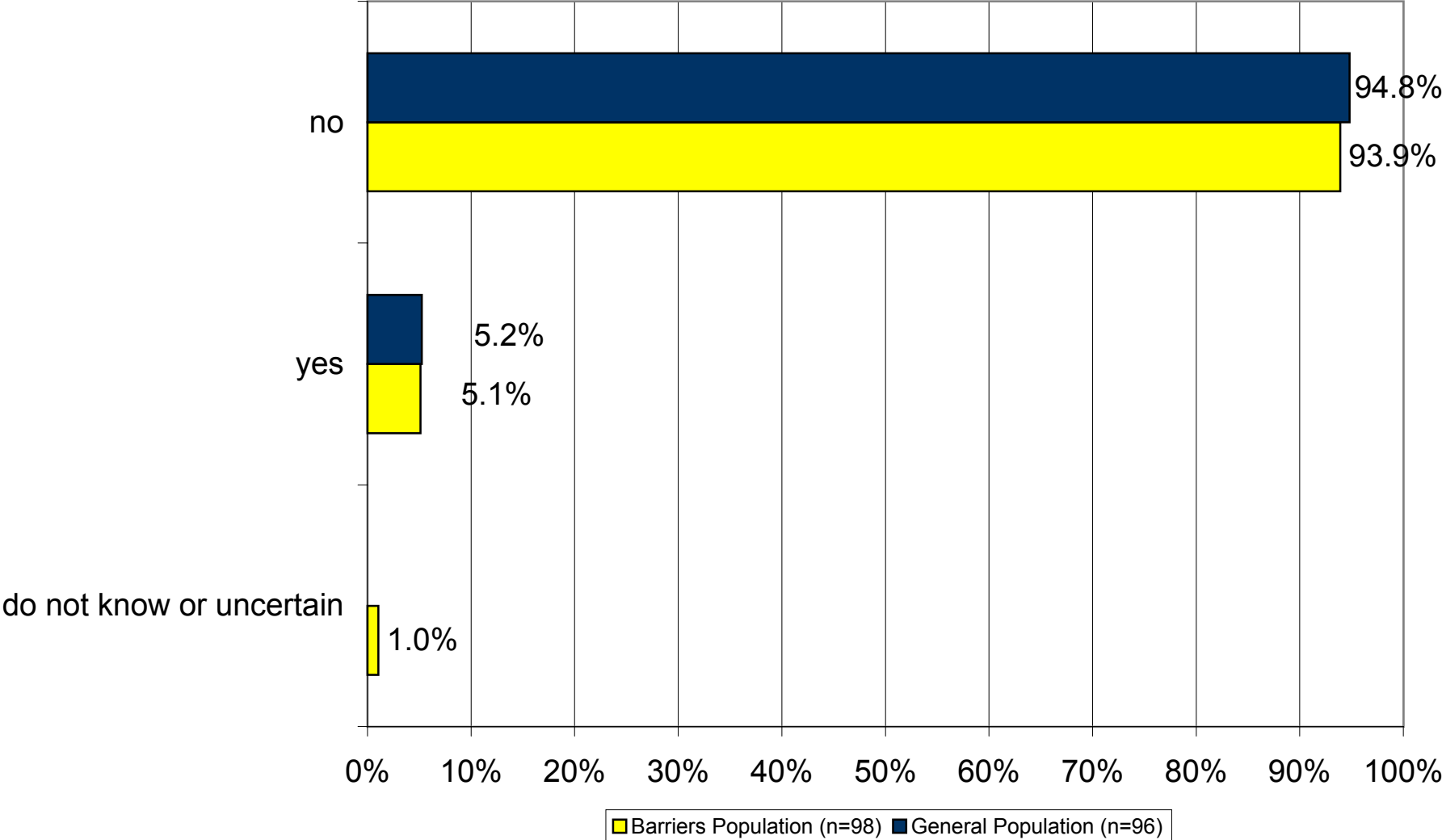
S101: Age of Respondents



S102: Race of the Respondents

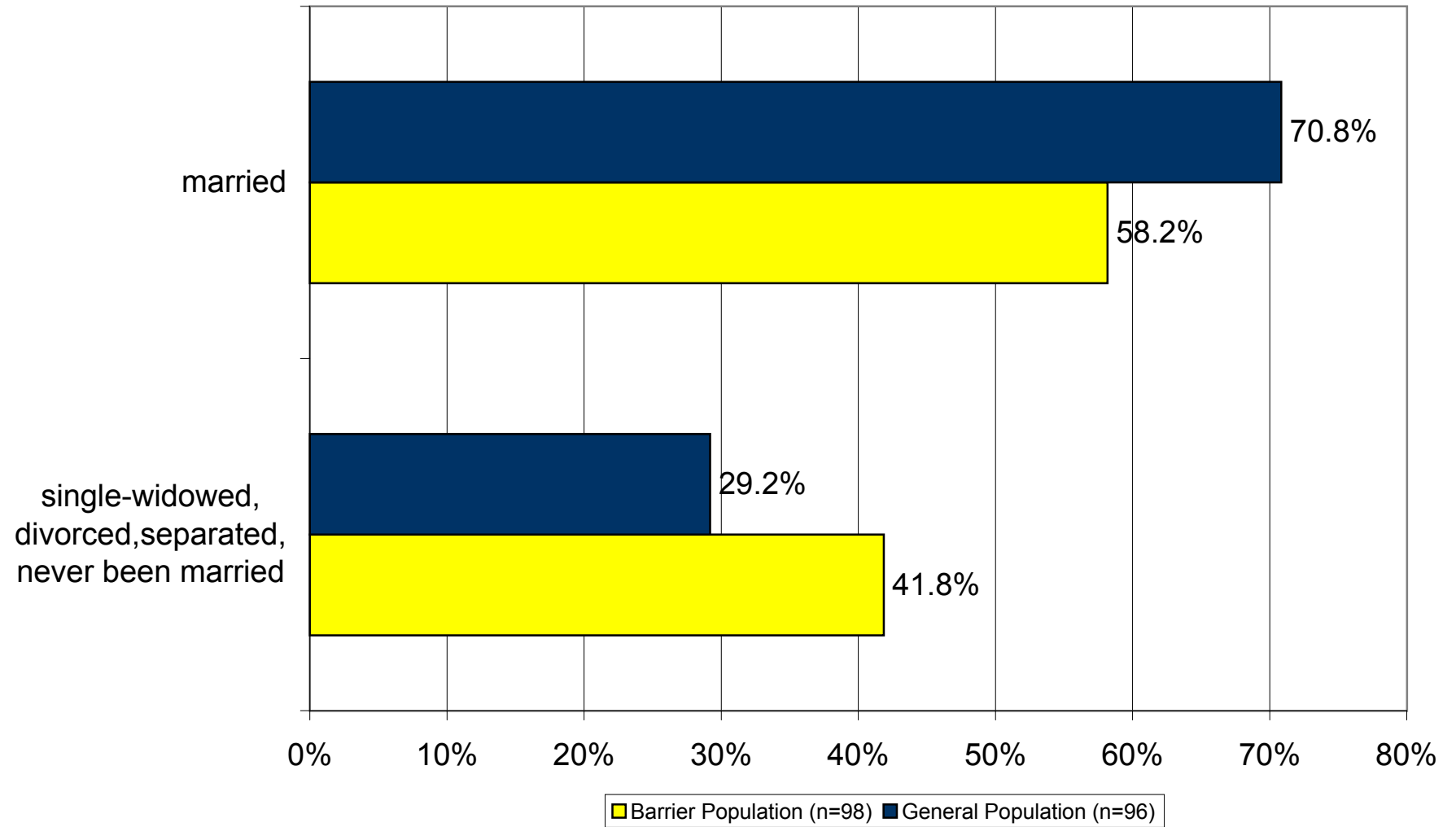


S103: Respondents of Spanish or Hispanic Descent

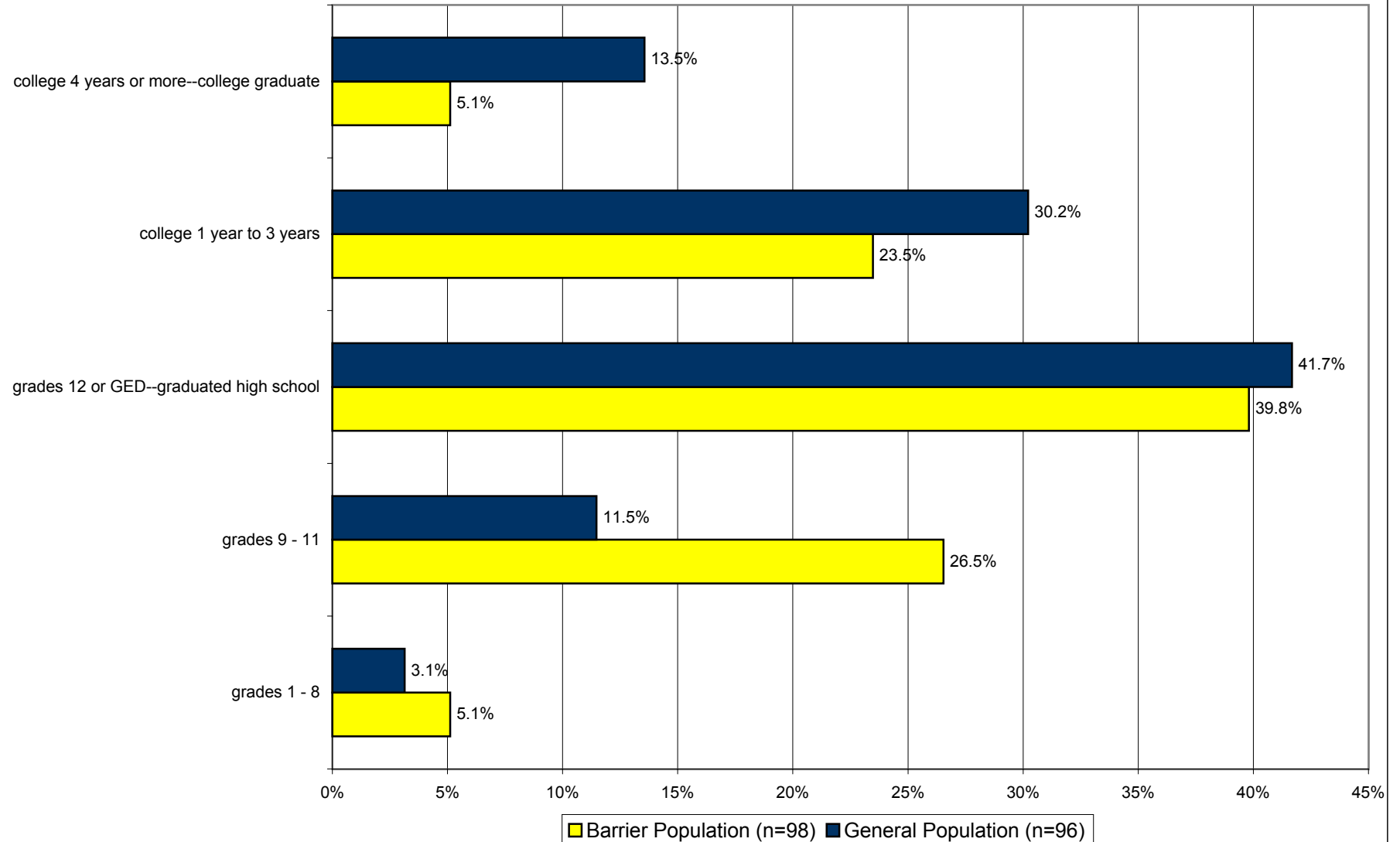


Source: Vernon Parish HABITS 2001-2002

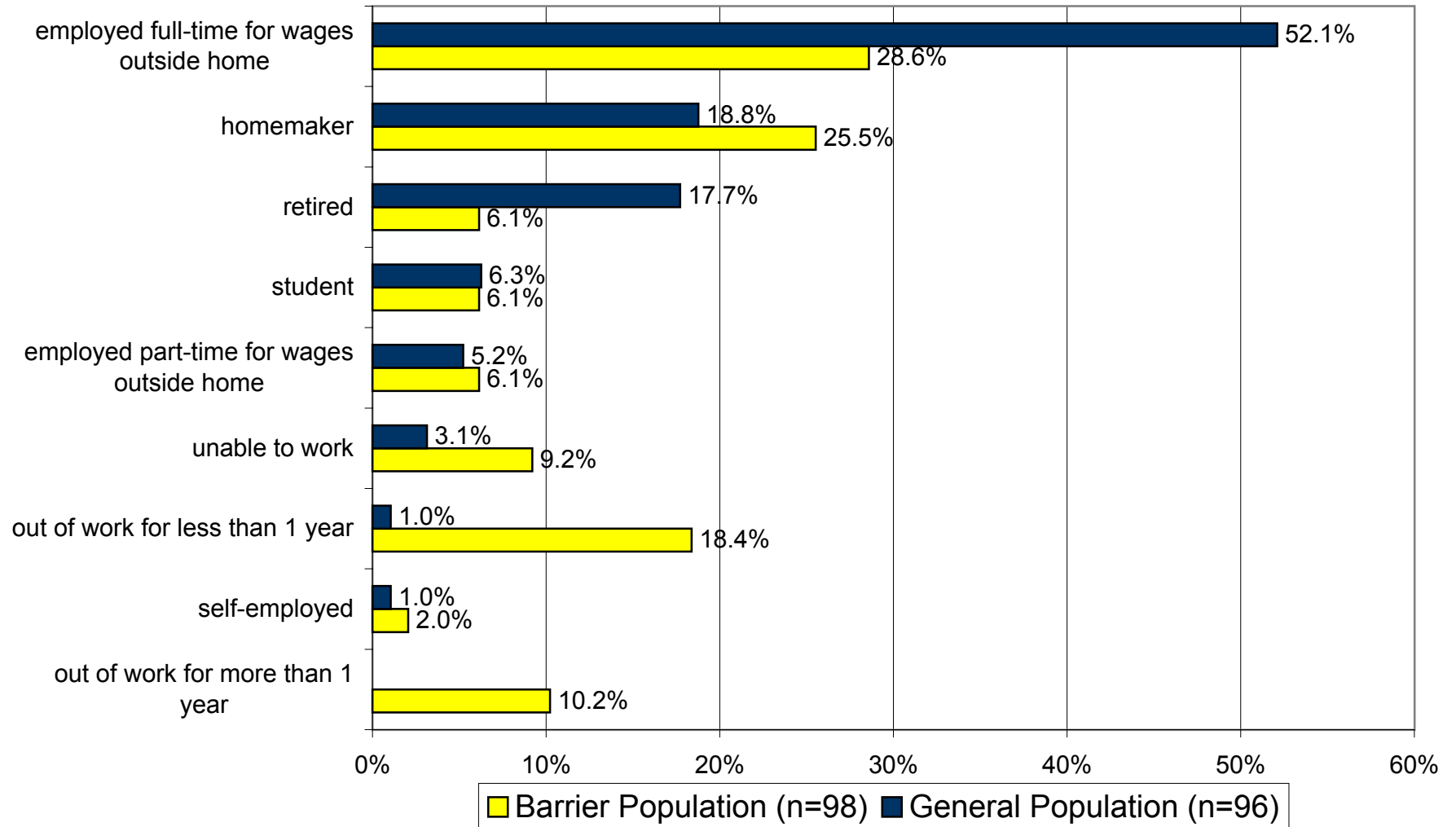
S104: Marital Status of Respondents



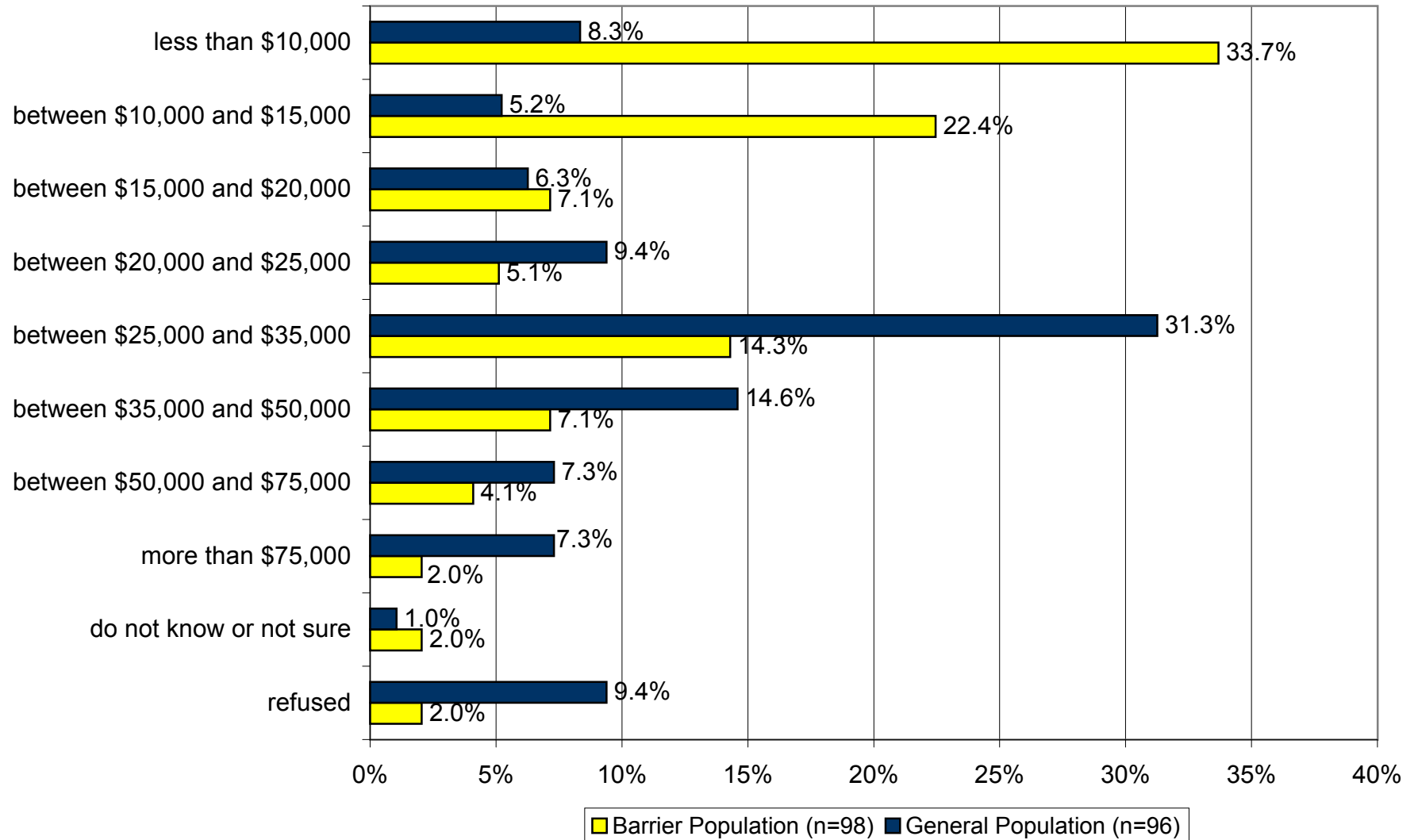
S106: Respondents' Highest Grade of School Completed



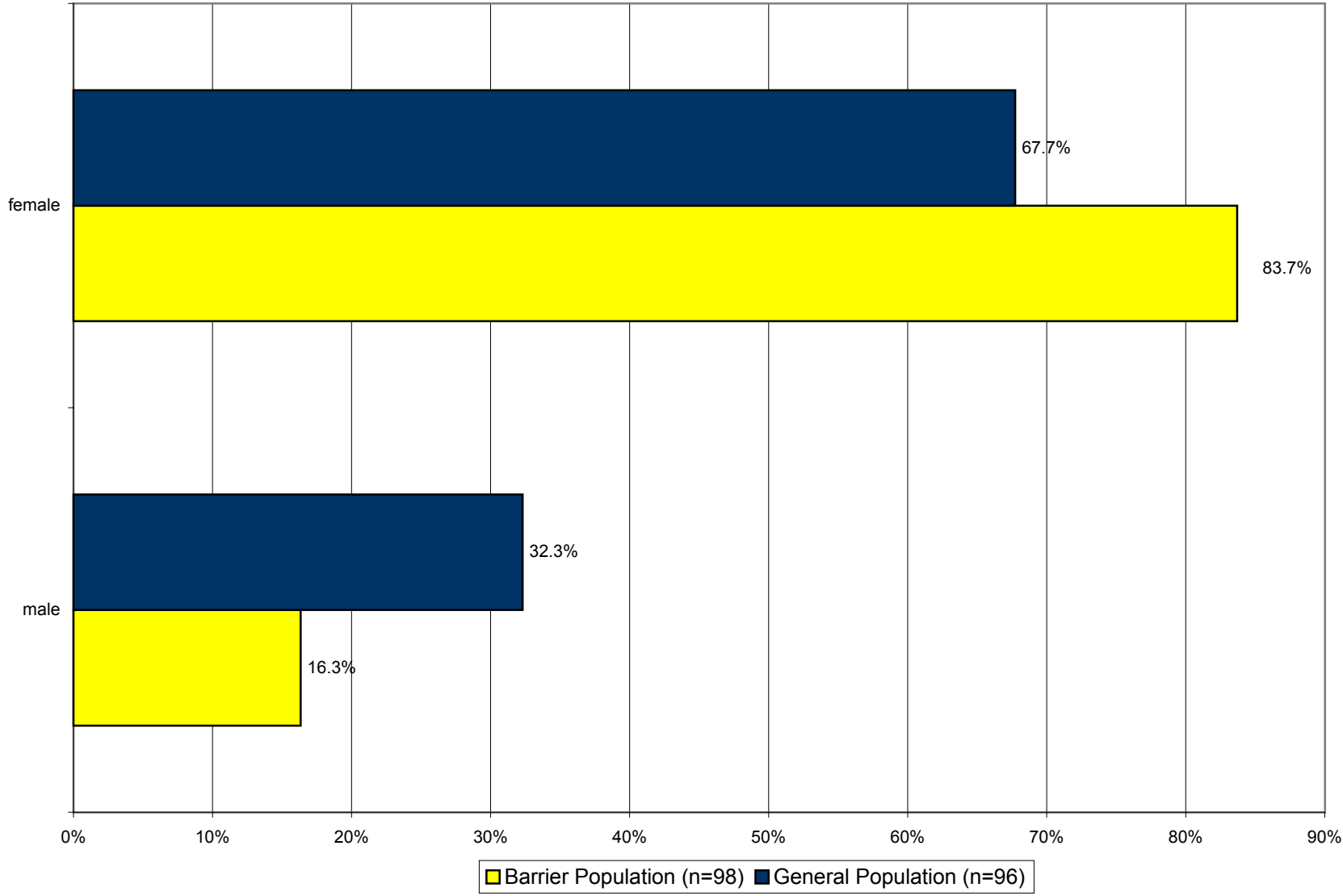
S107: Employment Status of Respondents (may reflect more than one type per respondent)



S108: Household Income from all sources



S109: Respondents' Gender



Source: Vernon Parish HABITS 2001-2002

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions Specific to Vernon Parish

The Study Team has drawn the following conclusions with respect to Vernon Parish:

- The population of Vernon Parish is significantly underserved within the parish borders, the result of there being only a very small number of healthcare providers offering services within the parish.
- Vernon Parish was designated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as a Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) for Primary Care on 10-13-1999 as well as a Medically Underserved Area (MUA) with a score of 37.7 (0=completely underserved; 100= best served or least underserved).
- The Louisiana State Board of Medical Examiners reported three Family Practice Physicians, two General Practice Physicians, nine Internal Medicine Physicians, one Obstetrics-Gynecology Physician, and two Pediatric Physicians who practice in Vernon Parish. This study identified three Family Practice Physicians, two General Practice Physicians, six Internal Medicine Physicians, two Obstetrics-Gynecology Physician, and four Pediatric Physicians who maintain office practices within the parish at the time of the study.
- The Louisiana State Board of Nursing reported two Nurse Practitioners who practice in Vernon Parish. This study identified one Nurse Practitioner who practices in Vernon Parish and one nurse practitioner who lives in the parish but practices in a neighboring parish.
- The Vernon Parish Health Unit provided 929 services to patients from Vernon Parish in the period January to December, 2000.
- The proximity of Vernon Parish to healthcare services in other parishes (notably Rapides Parish, Beauregard Parish, and Sabine Parish) combined with services offered through the Bayne-Jones Army Community Hospital at Fort Polk, Byrd Regional Hospital in Leesville, the Outpatient Medical Center in Leesville, and the Vernon Parish Health Unit, results in a level of service that many Vernon Parish residents would find acceptable.
- 39.1% of Vernon Parish households experience some type of healthcare access barrier. 31.3% of households surveyed by random telephone calling and 100.0% of households without working telephones, sampled in person, experience a barrier of some sort.
- Financial reasons – lack of adequate health insurance coupled with high healthcare costs – are the main causes of healthcare access barriers in Vernon Parish.
- “Could not afford” is the most common reason for having difficulty in obtaining care, delaying obtaining care, or not receiving needed care, cited by 4.2% of the general population of Vernon Parish households and by 34.7% of those experiencing healthcare access barriers.
- “Costs too much or not covered by insurance” is the most common reason for having problems with obtaining prescription medications, cited by 7.3% of the general population of Vernon Parish households and by 34.7% of those experiencing healthcare access barriers.

- Transportation reasons – “had no transportation – had to rely on other person”, “travel distance,” or “travel time” – are the most common reasons for problems getting to or from healthcare providers, cited by 6.2% of the general population of Vernon Parish and by 36.7% of those experiencing healthcare access barriers.
- A encouragingly low 10.4% of Vernon Parish households include at least one family member who lacks health insurance. 50.0% of Vernon Parish households include family members who have health insurance coverage through an employer-sponsored plan; 21.9% through Medicare; 6.3% through Medicaid; and 2.1% through LaCHIP.
- Among those households that indicate a barrier to healthcare access, the percentage of households including at least one family member without insurance is 61.2%; the employer-sponsored rate is 25.5%; 13.3% through Medicare; 19.4% through Medicaid; and 28.6% through LaCHIP.
- By far, the main reason for lack of health insurance is “could not afford to pay the premiums,” with 90.0% of Vernon Parish households without coverage so indicating. “Insurance company refused coverage” accounted for 10.0%. Reasons determined for lack of coverage among “barrier” households varied somewhat from that of the general population, with “lost Medicaid or medical assistance eligibility” at 10.0% and “lost job or changed employers” at 8.3% trailing the 70.0% who said they “could not afford to pay the premiums.”
- 94.8% of Vernon Parish households report having a place that family members go most often for healthcare; for 39.6%, that place is a doctor’s office; for 36.5%, a clinic at a hospital; for 2.1%, the emergency room at a hospital; for 10.4%, a clinic or health center.
- Among those households which indicate a barrier to healthcare access, the percentage of households reporting a place that family members go most often for healthcare is 85.7%. 39.8% go to a doctor’s office, 18.4% go to a clinic at a hospital, 10.2% attend a clinic or health center, and 8.2% go to a hospital emergency room.
- 30.2% of Vernon Parish households do not have a person they think of as their household’s main personal doctor or healthcare provider; among households experiencing barriers, that percentage is somewhat higher at 37.8%.
- Experiences of Vernon Parish households in general are similar to those of households experiencing barriers with respect to provider office hours, appointments, telephone contact, and medication inquiries, but persons in barrier households reported a much higher “walk-in” rate (21.4% vs. 8.3%) and a somewhat longer average wait time after arrival for an appointment – the latter possibly the effect of crowding at the particular provider facilities they go most often.
- The self-reported general health of respondents whose households experience barriers to healthcare access appears on the average to be worse than that of respondents in the randomly sampled general population – 62.2% of the former group reported “good, very good, or excellent” health while 82.4% of the general population reported “good, very good, or excellent.”
- The rates of presence of physician-diagnosed cases of chronic diseases that are among the leading causes of death are similar among the general population and barrier households, with the exception that respiratory diseases may have been diagnosed among the barrier population at a rate nearly double that of the general population.
- The rates of incidence of mobility limits of family members are similar among the general population and the barrier population.

- Age disparities are apparent when comparing the ages of respondents among the general population of Vernon Parish to the ages of respondents from the group of households that experience barriers to healthcare access. 36.7% of the respondents from barrier households are in the age range of from 18 to 29 years, whereas only 24.0% of respondents from the random sample of the general population are in that age range.
- One-and-a-half times as many children (1.40 per household) under the age of 18 were identified in the households with barriers to access to primary healthcare when compared to households from the general population (0.95 per household).
- Households with barriers to access to primary healthcare are only about one-half as likely to include persons over 65 years of age (0.11 per household) when compared to households from the general population (0.20 per household).
- Racial disparities are not apparent – “black or African American” faring somewhat better in comparison to “white or Caucasian” – when comparing the general population of Vernon Parish to respondents from that group of households that experience barriers to healthcare access. While 80.2% of the respondents from the random sample of the general population self-reported as being “white or Caucasian” and 16.7% “black or African-American”, respondents from barrier households was 82.7% “white or Caucasian” and 8.2% “black or African-American.” [Recently released Census 2000 data suggest that the “white or Caucasian” population of Vernon Parish is 73.7% with the “black or African-American” population being 17.1%. At this time, it might appear that white households were over-represented in the random sample. This cannot be verified at this point, however, until Census 2000 data on occupied housing units without telephones by race of householder becomes available, since a disproportionality may exist between white and black households without telephones.]
- Educational disparities, in terms of highest grade of school completed by respondents, are apparent when comparing the general population of Vernon Parish to respondents from that group of households that experience barriers to healthcare access. While 43.7% of respondents in the random sample of the general population reported at least 1 year of college, only 28.6% of the barrier population respondents reported that level of education. 14.6% of the general population, compared to 31.6% in the barrier population, reported not finishing high school.
- Employment disparities are clear when comparing the general population of Vernon Parish to respondents from that group of households that experience barriers to healthcare access. 52.1% of respondents in the random sample of the general population reported being employed full-time for wages outside the home; 28.6% of the barrier population respondents reported that circumstance. “Able but unemployed” was reported by 1.0% of the general population, but by 28.6% of the barrier population.
- Household Income disparities are dramatically apparent when comparing the general population of Vernon Parish to respondents from that group of households that experience barriers to healthcare access. While 19.8% of respondents in the random sample of the general population reported household incomes from all sources to be less than \$20,000 per year, 63.2% of the barrier population respondents reported that circumstance.
- Although respondents were overwhelmingly female rather than male in both the general population and the barrier population, this sampling bias need not suggest invalidation of the results of this Study. In the case of the random telephone survey of the general population, the high proportion of female respondents (67.7%) is more than likely explained by the initial call dialog in which the

interviewer asks to speak to a person who “makes or shares in making the healthcare decisions for family members in the household;” that role appears to be assumed primarily by a female member of the household, hence if a male answered the call the interviewer was referred to a female respondent if one was available. In the case of the in-person interviews held at the Office of Family Support and the Health Unit, most persons were observed to be female; accordingly, 83.7% of barrier household respondents were female.

Conclusions Generally Applicable to the Study Area

With respect to Supply of primary care providers, the Study Team concludes the following:

- Primary care providers are in undersupply and are not well distributed, as evidenced by federal Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) designations in many areas.
- It is difficult to track an accurate list of primary care providers, as no regular census is routinely performed nor is the mix of financial classes in their caseloads known.

With respect to Utilization of healthcare services, the Study Team concludes the following:

- Not all providers accept the uninsured and Medicaid patients at a level that can absorb the demand from those groups.
- Many residents of outlying parishes travel significant distances and lose potentially productive time seeking healthcare services far from their homes.

With respect to Demand by consumers, the Study Team concludes the following:

- Barriers may be “perceived,” but perceptions become reality in the consumers’ minds.
- A large number of households surveyed reported some healthcare access barrier, primarily financial – lack of adequate insurance is the leading cause.

Conclusions Regarding the Application of Findings

- Some of the data collected in this Study has never been collected or reported previously, with this Study’s level of local intensity.
- The margin of error ($\pm 10\%$) resulting from the sample size selected for the consumer survey (*Louisiana HABITS*) in this Study is appropriate to the goals of the Study, i.e., the creation of a baseline measure of causes and effects of barriers to access to healthcare. More narrow margins of error can only be achieved with substantially increased sampling rates that would necessitate additional expense.
- At this time, the data reported in this Study should be principally used as a baseline for comparison with studies undertaken after improvement initiatives are implemented.
- Data collected in this Study are considered locally definitive and predictive, but without comparative data, trends cannot be discerned.
- While consumer surveys do measure “perception” rather than “truth” and healthcare access barriers may be “perceived” rather than “actual,” it is important to recognize that perceptions can in fact become reality if deeply felt by the consumer.
- Repeated consumer surveys will be useful in understanding trends and monitoring the effectiveness of barrier-elimination interventions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Study Team respectfully suggests consideration of the following recommendations relative to reducing healthcare access barriers:

- Encouragement of local or regional medical societies' and healthcare professional associations' publishing of a single comprehensive directory of services, both in print form and as a website. The audiences for these publications should be both referral and case management services and the general public.
- Encouragement of the formation of local coalitions or consortia, to address local health problems and facilitate the development of healthcare delivery partnerships or networks – especially in rural, underserved areas.
- Encouragement of target setting by those local coalitions or consortia, relative to desired improvements in access to healthcare services – based both on the findings and conclusions of this Study and on the suggestions incorporated in Healthy People 2010, the U. S. Surgeon General's program for improving community health status.
- Encouragement of local coalitions or consortia actively managing to their own Healthy People 2010 targets, determining priorities and planning initiatives as appropriate locally.

THE COMMUNITY CAN ...

- 1. Gather information about local providers and services.**
Your community can benefit from knowing what services are available and what hours of operation they have, as well as what types of coverage they will accept.
- 2. Form a phone-tree for people to use when they need care and need assistance getting there.**
Many people do not have access to transportation. If this is a problem in your parish, consider raising money to buy or rent a van or bus for medical purposes. Your community group can coordinate to care for vulnerable groups, such as children, the elderly and the disabled.
- 3. Help community members to find appropriate coverage.**
Medicaid and LaCHIP both need to be *APPLIED FOR*. Recruit someone to volunteer their services advising people about their health care options and helping them apply for coverage.
- 4. Create a list of daycare options and design transportation options for children in daycare.**
Encourage providers to visit schools and day-cares to be available for children and their families for education, screenings and care.
- 5. Hold health fairs with screenings and build in a follow-up method.**
Preventive services, such as screenings, are only useful if action is taken. When your group plans a health fair, engage local providers who will do a more thorough examination on the spot and follow-up.
- 6. Encourage employers with small businesses to work together to provide health insurance for workers.**
Small businesses, through their Chambers of Commerce and other networking organizations, may be able to pool resources to provide more affordable options for their employees and employees' families.

Vernon Parish Health Profile 1999, pp. 141-142, Louisiana Office of Public Health.

SELECTED TERMS

Access to Healthcare: Convenient availability of *healthcare providers* together with appropriate mechanisms (insurance, health plans, government programs, etc.) to minimize the risk of unexpected expense of obtaining their services.

Health: A state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. (World Health Organization)

Healthcare: Any activity or procedure intended to sustain or restore *health*.

Healthcare Access Barriers: Anything that impedes or prevents access to healthcare. There are three classes of barriers to access to healthcare:

1. Financial -- including cost, lack of insurance, etc.
2. Structural -- including supply and location of caregivers, etc.
3. Personal -- including mobility, language, etc.

Health Insurance: The contractual relationship existing when one party (the insurer), for a consideration, agrees to reimburse another (the insured) for healthcare costs related to the insured's loss of health caused by disease or bodily injury.

Healthcare Providers: Physicians (MDs & DOs) and other practitioners of *healthcare* -- including advanced practice nurse practitioners (NPs), physician assistants (PAs), nurses (RNs, LPNs), dentists (DDSs), optometrists (ODs), chiropractors (DCs), pharmacists (RPhs), licensed physical therapists (LPTs), certified nurses aides (CNAs), and others -- who provide *healthcare* in office practices, clinics, home settings, pharmacies, rehabilitation centers, and other venues; facilities such as hospitals are considered "institutional" *healthcare providers*.

Medicare (Title XVIII): A *health insurance* program sponsored by the U. S. federal government for people aged 65 and older, for persons who have been eligible for Social Security disability payments for more than two years, and for certain workers and their dependents who need kidney transplantation or dialysis; Medicare presently does not include a prescription drug benefit.

Medicaid (Title XIX): A federally aided, state-operated and administered program that provides *health insurance* for certain low-income persons in need of *healthcare*; in Louisiana, Medicaid includes a prescription drug benefit.

Nurse Practitioner: A registered nurse (RN) qualified and specially trained to provide *primary care*, generally under the supervision of a *physician* but not necessarily in his or her presence; also known as an “advanced practice nurse.”

Physician: A professional person qualified by education and authorized by law to practice medicine; to be a *physician*, the person must hold the academic degree Doctor of Medicine (MD) or Doctor of Osteopathy (DO), only.

Physician Assistant: A specially trained and licensed individual who performs tasks otherwise performed by a *physician*, under the direction of a supervising *physician*.

Primary Care: Basic or general *healthcare* that emphasizes the point at which the patient first seeks assistance from a *healthcare provider*; care of the less complex and more common illnesses.

Primary Care Providers: *Healthcare providers* who principally offer *primary care* services, including *physicians* (MDs & DOs) and *nurse practitioners* (NPs) who specialize in general practice, family practice, internal medicine, pediatrics, or gynecology and obstetrics; *physician assistants* (PAs) may provide primary care under the supervision of a physician.