

The Cost of Getting Care

Health, coverage, and access across Southeast Missouri

NOVEMBER 2026 · ACCESS TO EVERYTHING

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WHY COUNTY-LEVEL NUMBERS

A state average doesn't tell every county's story

One number, many places

A statewide rate is a single figure covering 114 counties. Counties that sit far from it disappear inside it.

Neighbors can differ sharply

Two counties that share a border can be ten points apart on coverage, and the state average sits between them.

How to read this brief

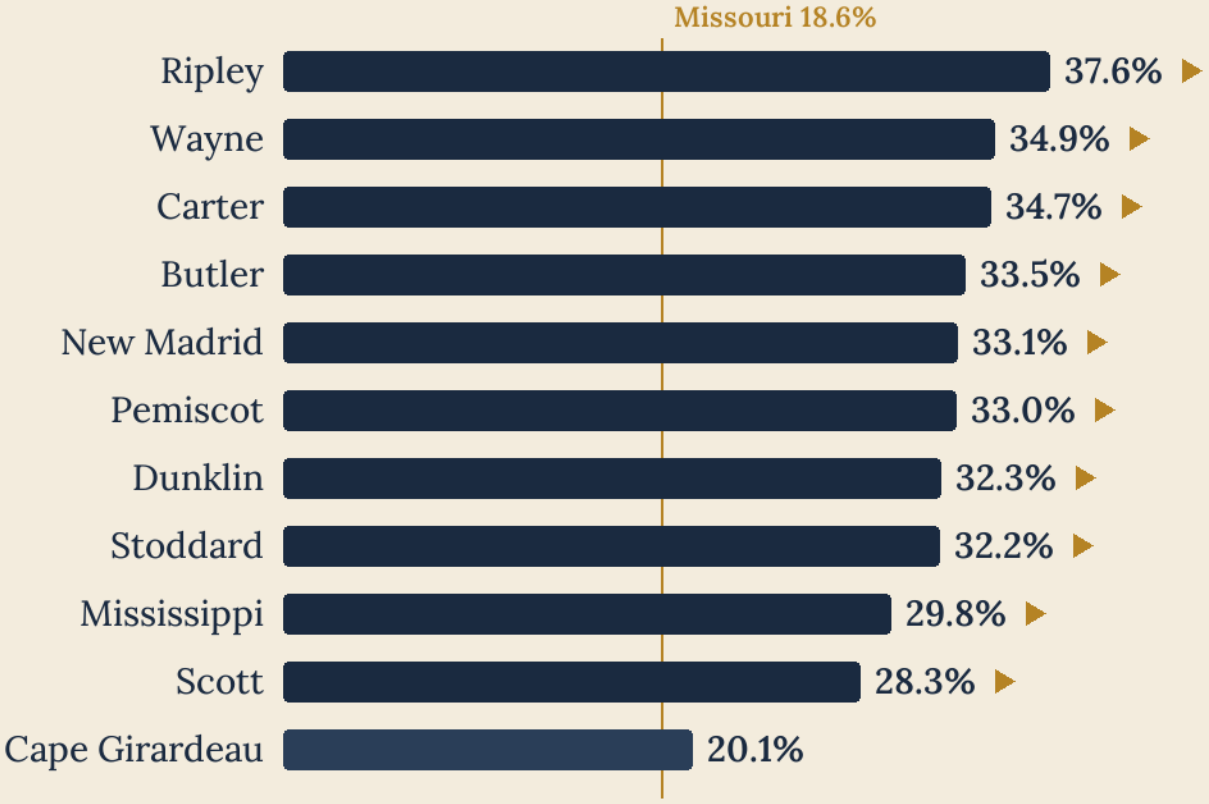
County figures are shown alongside Missouri's statewide estimates. Statistical significance is based on comparisons with the rest of Missouri, not between individual counties.

This snapshot draws on county-level data for eighteen Southeast Missouri counties and charts twelve of them, with particular attention to eight across the Bootheel and surrounding communities.

County figures: 2022 Missouri County-Level Study, Missouri DHSS.

HOW RESIDENTS RATE THEIR HEALTH

Adults who describe their own health as fair or poor



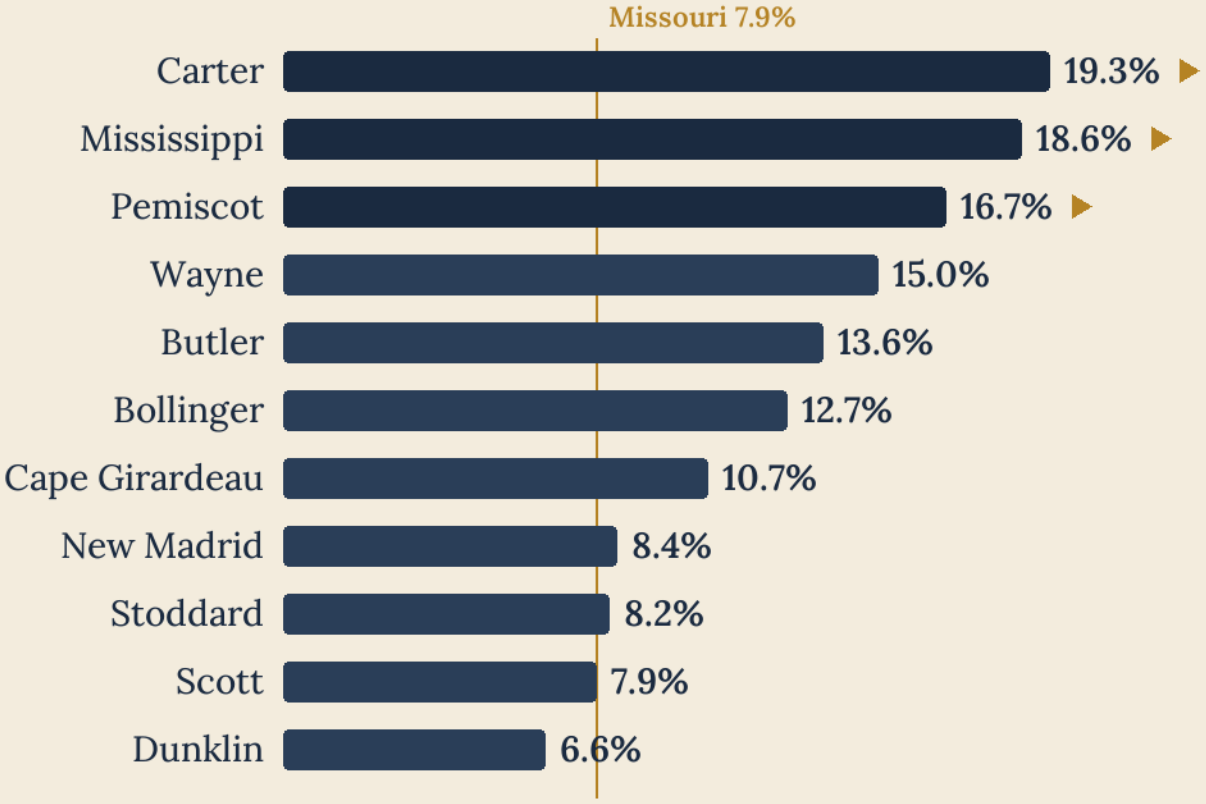
This is people rating their own health, not a diagnosis rate. A gold arrow marks a county the state's study found significantly higher than the rest of Missouri. Fourteen of the eighteen counties meet that test.

2022 Missouri County-Level Study, Missouri DHSS. Survey estimates, 275 to 390 interviews per county. Charts show selected counties from the eighteen in this snapshot.

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INSURANCE COVERAGE

Adults ages 18 to 64 without health insurance



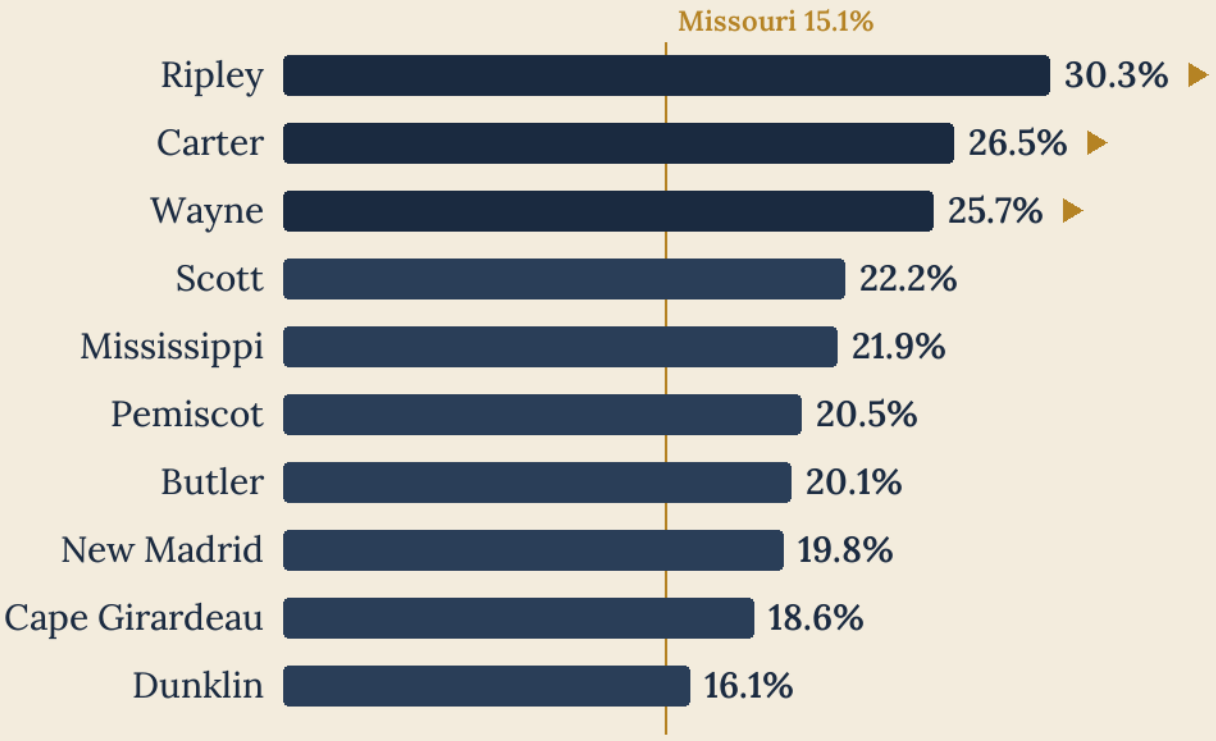
Three of the counties shown are significantly higher than the rest of Missouri. Across all eighteen, four are. Dunklin and Scott sit at or below the state rate. Coverage tells you who holds a card. It does not tell you who could afford to use it.

2022 Missouri County-Level Study, Missouri DHSS. Survey estimates, 162 to 244 interviews per county. Charts show selected counties from the eighteen in this snapshot.

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DENTAL CARE AND COST

Adults who needed dental care and could not get it because of cost

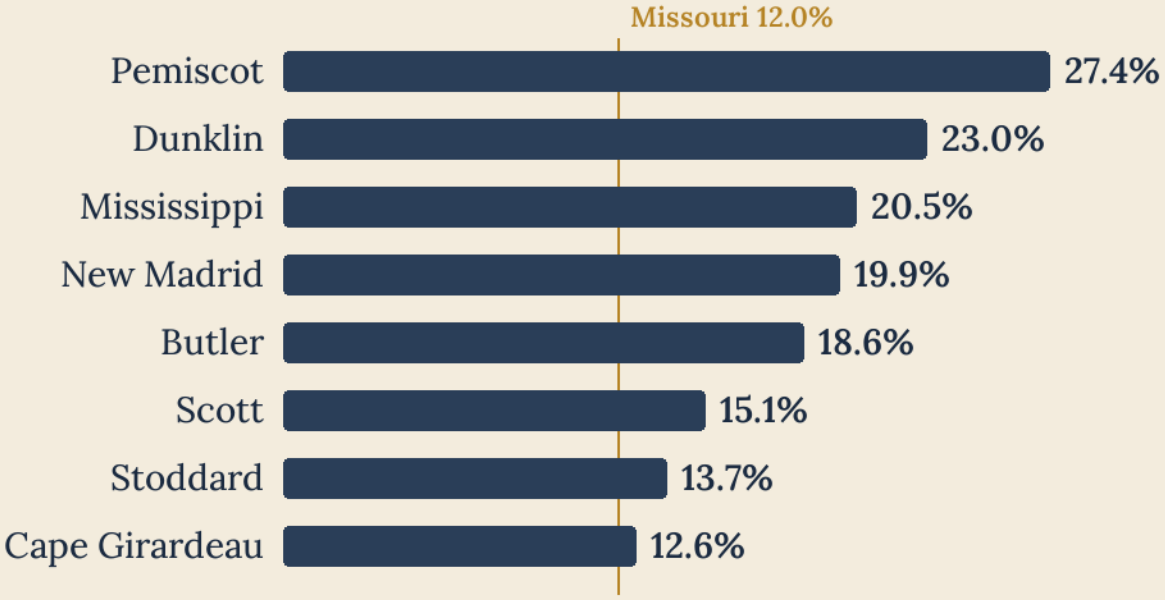


Every county shown is above the state rate, and three of them significantly so. Across all eighteen counties, fifteen are above Missouri and five are significantly higher.

2022 Missouri County-Level Study, Missouri DHSS. Survey estimates, 277 to 391 interviews per county. Charts show selected counties from the eighteen in this snapshot.

POVERTY, ALL AGES

Residents living below the federal poverty line

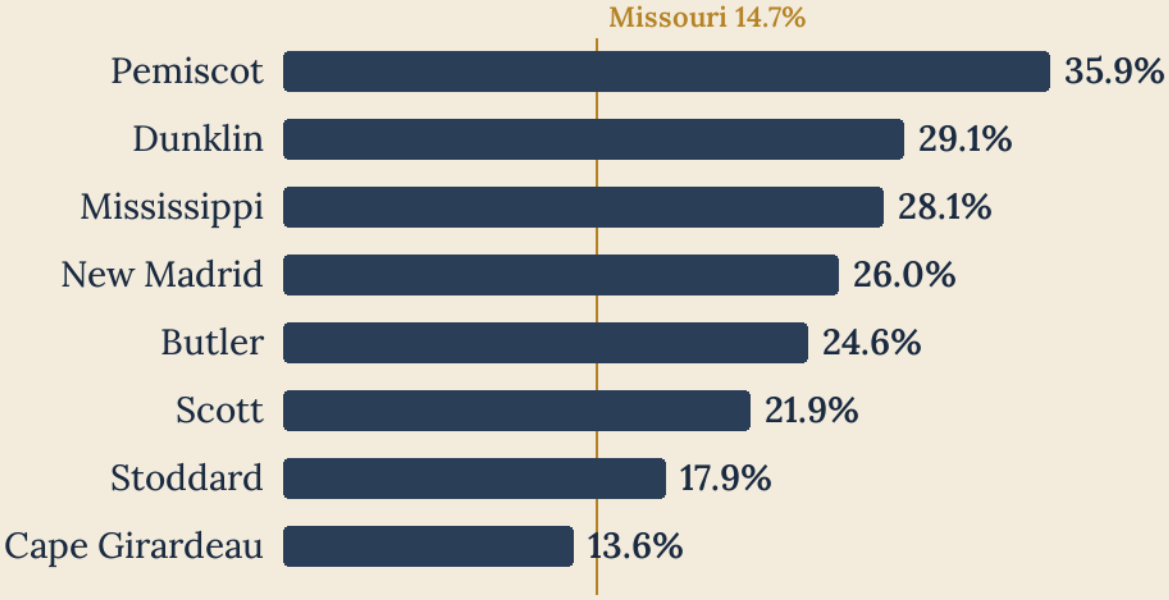


All eight counties shown are above the state rate. Median household income across them runs from $42,080 in Pemiscot to $67,445 in Cape Girardeau, against $68,484 statewide.

Census Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, 2023. Model-based county estimates. Charts show selected counties from the eighteen in this snapshot.

POVERTY, CHILDREN UNDER 18

Children living below the federal poverty line



Child poverty exceeds the statewide estimate in seven of the eight counties shown. These figures describe household economic conditions, not the number of families who delayed healthcare.

Census Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates, 2023. Model-based county estimates. Charts show selected counties from the eighteen in this snapshot.

PRIMARY CARE AVAILABILITY

Residents per primary care physician, 2021

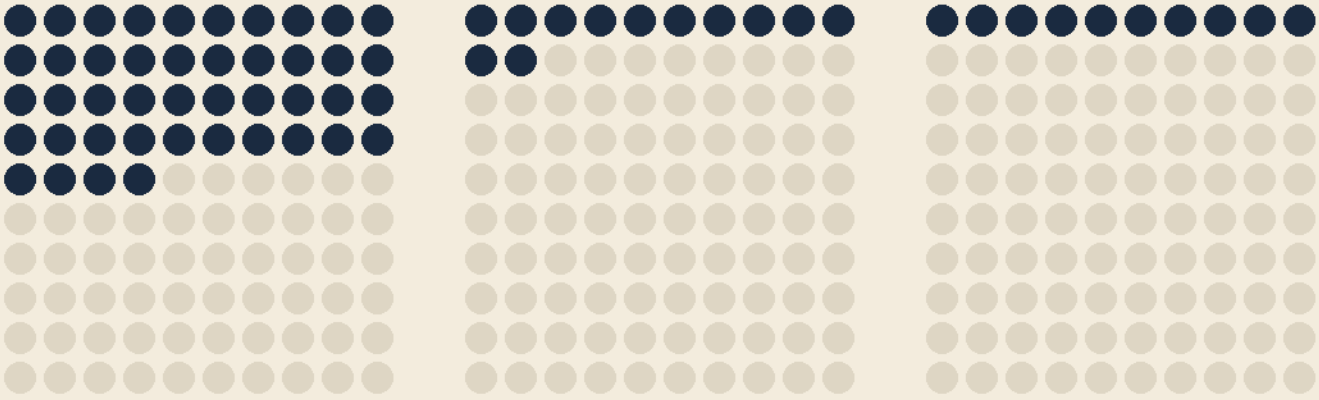
New Madrid	16,035 : 1
Ripley	10,617 : 1
Mississippi	6,269 : 1
Carter	5,320 : 1
Dunklin	3,960 : 1
Pemiscot	2,539 : 1
Stoddard	2,034 : 1
Scott	1,992 : 1
Missouri statewide	**1,421 : 1**
Cape Girardeau	1,110 : 1
Butler	1,053 : 1

Every county here contains at least one federally designated shortage area. Most cover a specific low-income population or a single clinic rather than the whole county. Mississippi, New Madrid, Scott and Stoddard carry whole-county mental health designations.

Ratios: County Health Rankings 2025 Missouri release, physician data 2021. Designations: HRSA Data Warehouse, November 2026, active only.

INSURANCE DOESN'T ELIMINATE COST

Missouri adults who needed a doctor and could not go because of cost



44.3%
uninsured adults

12.5%
all adults

9.9%
insured adults

Each grid is 100 people. Statewide figures, not Southeast Missouri estimates. Nationally, 12.8% of all adults.

KFF analysis of the CDC 2025 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, KFF State Health Facts.

WHAT THE RESEARCH TELLS US

What the Numbers Tell Us About Southeast Missouri

How people rate their health varies

Fourteen of the eighteen counties rate their own health significantly worse than the rest of Missouri. Cape Girardeau and Perry do not.

Coverage does not track with it

Dunklin has one of the lowest uninsured rates here, below the state, and is still among those fourteen.

Economic conditions and physician supply vary too

Child poverty runs from 13.0% in Perry to 35.9% in Pemiscot. Residents per primary care physician run from 1,053 to one in Butler to 16,035 to one in New Madrid. These conditions sit alongside each other. The data does not establish what causes what.

What none of it records

Who went without, and what they gave up instead.

All eighteen counties carry active federal shortage-area designations for both primary care and mental health. Four are whole-county for mental health (Mississippi, New Madrid, Scott, Stoddard) and one is whole-county for primary care (Iron); the rest cover a specific population or a single clinic.

SOURCES AND METHOD

Where every number came from

2022 Missouri County-Level Study

Missouri DHSS. Telephone survey of adults, 2022. Eighteen counties, 162 to 391 interviews each. Significance is against the rest of Missouri, never county to county.

Census SAIPE 2023

Poverty, child poverty, median household income. Model-based, not significance-tested.

County Health Rankings 2025

Physician ratios, 2021 data. Oregon County reported none.

KFF State Health Facts

KFF analysis of the CDC's 2025 BRFSS. Missouri statewide only.

HRSA Data Warehouse

All 18 counties, pulled November 2026. Active designations only.

I'm a paid fellow in Missouri Foundation for Health's Creator Fellowship.

This community research snapshot was compiled by Soft Spoken Convos using publicly available data. It is intended to inform conversations about healthcare access across Southeast Missouri. The interpretations are those of Soft Spoken Convos and do not represent official findings or endorsements by Missouri Foundation for Health. Found an error? Tell me at softspokenconvos.com/talk.



TALK ABOUT IT TUESDAY

What have you had to sacrifice just to afford the healthcare you needed?

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