

Nearly 6.4 million Californians lack health insurance, report shows

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Nearly one-fifth of all Californians under age 65 were without health insurance for all or some of 2007, according to a policy brief released today by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research.

Drawing on comprehensive new data from the California Health Interview Survey (CHIS), the policy brief's authors found that 6.4 million Californians lacked any health insurance coverage for all or some of 2007, the most recent year for which comprehensive statewide data is available.

This number represents 19.5 percent of all Californians under age 65, which is slightly lower than the uninsured rate of 20.2 percent in 2005. However, the gains were small and are now likely to be reversed by the current recession, according to the authors of the brief, "Nearly 6.4 Million Californians Lacked Health Insurance in 2007."

"We're looking at the final year of an economic expansion and yet the gains in coverage were small," said lead author E. Richard Brown, director of the Center for Health Policy Research. "If the employer-based system can't increase health insurance in good times, how will they do it in bad? The answer is: they can't. Only comprehensive health care reform will change the equation."

In 2003, the state's unemployment rate rose to 6.8 percent, which was a main driver of the decline in employment-based insurance from 56.4 percent in 2001 to 53.8 percent in 2003. Today in California, the

statewide unemployment rate is more than 8 percent and is predicted to rise.

"It suggests we are now in for an even more severe decline in employment-based insurance than in 2003," said co-author and senior research associate Shana Alex Lavarreda.

Funded by grants from the California Endowment and the California Wellness Foundation, the policy brief draws on the latest comprehensive data from the CHIS, the largest state health survey in the nation. That data was collected from more than 50,000 Californians, including adults, teenagers and children, on a range of health topics.

"Our current system of health coverage locks too many families out," said Dr. Robert K. Ross, president and chief executive officer of the California Endowment. "We desperately need a system that ensures all Californians have access to health coverage, regardless of health status, income and employment."

Easily searchable CHIS data on uninsurance and other topics by state, region and county can be found at www.askchis.com. A quick summary of health insurance statistics by county or region is available at the Center for Health Policy Research's updated Health SNAPSHOTs.

"This policy brief is another example of the critical information that the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research is able to provide through analysis of data from the California Health Interview Survey," said Gary L. Yates, president and CEO of the California Wellness Foundation. "It is difficult to overestimate the relevance of this data source in times like these, when so many Californians lack adequate health coverage."

Source: University of California - Los Angeles

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