

More Americans Skipping Needed Medical Care

BY MARY ELLEN SCHNEIDER

More than 40% of adults in the United States went without necessary medical care in 2010 due to cost, up from 29% a decade ago, according to the Commonwealth Fund's Biennial Health Insurance Survey.

Skipping needed care such as prescription drugs, specialist visits, and follow-up treatment is even more common among moderate- and low-income groups. For example, 56% of Americans with household incomes under 200% of the federal poverty level went without necessary care last year, according to the survey.

The survey, conducted from July through November 2010, is based on phone interviews with a national sample of more than 4,000 U.S. adults aged 19 and older. The analysis is limited to the approximately 3,000 adults aged 19-64 years.

Cost was an issue for those with and without health insurance. About two-thirds of adults who were uninsured during 2010 had trouble accessing care due to cost, as did 31% of insured respondents.

Preventive care also took a hit. Only half of adults reported that they were up to date on five recommended screening tests: blood pressure and cholesterol tests, mammograms, colon cancer screenings, and Pap tests. Those with lower incomes were less likely to get screened: While 65% of adults with a household income at or above 400% of the federal poverty level were up to date, only 36% of adults at less than 133% of poverty level were.

"The survey findings paint a dire pic-

ture of the degree to which low- and moderate-income families are currently burdened by costs of care and the degree to which a severe economic crisis can affect the health security of working families," Sara R. Collins, Ph.D., vice president for Affordable Health Insurance at the Commonwealth Fund, said during a press conference to release the findings.

Dr. Collins said the controversial Affordable Care Act will help to address

some of the problems highlighted in the survey by alleviating the cost burden on the lowest-income Americans. She cited the expansion of the Medicaid program and federal subsidies to purchase private health coverage, both of which begin in 2014, as ways to reduce out-of-pocket costs and improve access to care.

The Commonwealth Fund report also noted worsening trends in coverage and medical debt over the last decade:

- About 28% of adults in the United States were uninsured for part of 2010, up from 24% in 2001.
- About 40% of adults reported that they had problems paying their medical bills in 2010, up from 34% in 2005.
- About 32% of Americans spent 10% or more of their household income on out-of-pocket costs and premiums in 2010, compared with 23% in 2005 and 21% in 2001.

Senate Supports Repeal of 1099 Requirement

The Senate signaled its intention to repeal from the health reform law a tax-reporting requirement that has been labeled as overly burdensome by the medical and business communities.

The Affordable Care Act currently includes a provision requiring businesses—including physician practices—to file a 1099 tax form with the Internal Revenue Service for all vendor payments of more than \$600 per year. The requirement is set to take effect in 2012.

Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.) proposed repealing the 1099 requirement as an amendment to an air transportation modernization bill (S. 223). The amendment passed by a vote of 81-17. The American Medical Association has been lobbying against the 1099 requirement, noting that compliance would negatively impact physicians' practices.

"It is estimated that paperwork already takes up as much as a third of a physician's workday—time that could be better spent with patients—and this provision would only increase that burden," AMA President Cecil B. Wilson said in a statement.

—Mary Ellen Schneider

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References: 1. IMS Health Inc. IMS National Sales Perspectives (12 months ending October 2009). 2. IMS Health Inc. IMS MIDAS (MATQ2009). 3. Data on file. Access Point, Q3 2009.

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