Uninsured Rate Climbs, Reflecting 10-Year Trend

BY ALICIA AULT

The number of uninsured Americans rose last year, with 21% of all adults aged 18-64 years reporting that they were uninsured at the time that they were interviewed for the National Health Interview Survey, federal officials reported.

That's up from 19.7% the previous year and reflects a trend over the past decade of an increasing lack of health insurance, at least among adults, according to a survey by the National Center for Health Statistics, a part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Rates of coverage for children, on the other hand, have mostly improved.

Since 1999, increasing proportions of people have reported that they were uninsured at the time of the annual survey, for part of the year prior to their interviews, and for a year or more, said the NCHS in its report, which was released early and will be published in CDC's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report.

Overall, 46.3 million people—or 15.4% of the population—were uninsured at the time they were interviewed in 2009. The survey found that even greater numbers of people reported that they were uninsured for at least part of the year before the interview—about 58.5 million—but that a slightly smaller number, 32.8 million, had been uninsured for more than a year at the time they were queried.

A greater proportion of children than adults were covered by public health plans, which could explain the children's higher rate of coverage, according to the survey. In 2009, 37.7% of children under age 18 were covered by a public plan, up from 34.2% the previous year. Rates of public coverage for low-income children increased. Federal officials in both the Obama and Bush administrations have emphasized enrolling more eligible children in the public Children's Health Insurance Plan, which is administered by states.

Conversely, only 14.4% of adults aged 18-64 years had public coverage. And private coverage for adults declined from 68% in 2008 to 66% in 2009, according to the survey.

There was no significant change in private coverage for children of any income level.

States with larger Hispanic populations had greater proportions of uninsured. One-quarter of Texas and Florida residents under age 65 years were uninsured at the time of the interview. One-fifth did not have coverage in California and Georgia. In Florida, 13% of children lacked coverage when interviewed, and in Texas, that number was almost 17%.

Nine states had lower rates of uninsured than the national average of 17.5%: Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Washington, and Wisconsin. ■

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