

Lack of Health Insurance Behind Thousands of Deaths

BY MARY ELLEN SCHNEIDER
New York Bureau

In 2006, more than seven working-age people in the state of Texas died each day because of a lack of health insurance coverage, according to estimates from the consumer group Families USA.

Families USA released state-by-state estimates of deaths attributed to a lack of health insurance for individuals aged 25-64 years.

The report builds on the work of the Institute of Medicine, which in 2002 released a report that found that approximately 18,000 individuals aged 25-64 years died in 2000 because they were uninsured.

A more recent study from the Urban Institute found that approximately 22,000 people in that age bracket died in 2006 because they didn't have health insurance.

"Our report highlights how our inadequate system of health coverage condemns a great number of people to an early death simply because they don't have the same access to health care as their insured neighbors," Ron Pollack, executive director of Families USA, said during a teleconference to release the report.

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In general, the uninsured are less likely to have a usual source of care outside the emergency department, they often go without screenings and preventive care, and they frequently forgo needed medical treatment, Mr. Pollack said. While this often results in poor health, in the extreme it also leads to death, he said.

For example, in Utah, where 19% of the 1.2 million working-age people in the state were uninsured in 2006, on average three people died each week because of a lack of health insurance coverage. Between 2000 and 2006, more than 800 people died because of a lack of health insurance, the group estimated.

In Massachusetts, about 12% of the 3.4 million people between the ages of 25 and 64 years were uninsured in 2006. Families USA estimates that more than six working-age individuals in the state died each week in 2006 because of a lack of insurance coverage. Between 2000 and 2006, more than 2,000 working-age adults died because they didn't have insurance coverage, the group estimated.

However, these numbers are likely to improve in the next couple of years as more people gain insurance coverage as a result of health reform legislation passed in that state, Mr. Pollack said.

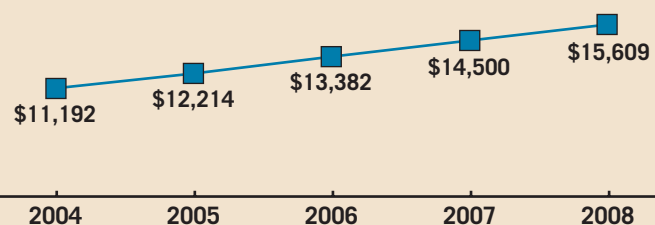
The Families USA estimates are based on 2000-2005 state mortality and population data from the National Center for Health Statistics and the U.S. Census Bu-

reau Current Population Survey data from 2000 to 2006. The group released 50 state-specific reports but did not make state-to-state comparisons. The differing population sizes, mortality rates, and uninsured rates make it difficult to compare states, according to Families USA. ■

The state-by-state figures are available online at www.familiesusa.org.

DATA WATCH

Total Health Care Spending for a Family of Four Is Increasing



Note: Based on the Milliman Medical Index, for estimated average costs including employer and employee health insurance premiums, using claims from millions of members.

Source: Milliman

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