

Texas again tops bigger states in level of uninsured adults

Federal report also says only Florida has higher rate of uncovered kids

08:14 AM CDT on Thursday, June 22, 2006

By **ROBERT T. GARRETT** / The Dallas Morning News

AUSTIN – Texas still leads big states in the percentage of adults without health insurance, a new federal report states.

And it continues to rank high in the percentage of uninsured children, though Florida now is worse, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported Wednesday.

The report's bright spot is a steady increase nationally in the percentage of children covered by Medicaid or state Children's Health Insurance Programs, which Congress authorized in 1997. The share of youngsters under 18 with "public coverage" has increased from 20 percent in 1998 to nearly 30 percent last year.

"Our results suggest the success of state CHIP efforts at increasing coverage," said health statistician Robin Cohen, the study's co-author.

However, the percentage of uninsured working-age adults – 18 to 64 – has remained at about 19 percent the past eight years.

Texas had a higher percentage of uninsured residents last year – 24.6 percent – than any of the other 20 most populous states, the study found. Only 6.5 percent of Massachusetts residents lacked coverage.

Texas also led in uninsured working-age adults – nearly 31 percent, compared with only 9 percent in Minnesota.

While about 9 percent of American children had neither public nor private insurance last year, nearly double that percentage – 17.6 percent – lacked health coverage in Texas. In Florida, the percentage was 18.2 percent.

The random survey of nearly 41,000 households was conducted before Texas began having a rapid decline of children in its CHIP and Medicaid programs. Texas switched vendors for its CHIP call centers, made CHIP families submit more proof of income, and expanded privatization of screening for Medicaid and other programs.

Anne Dunkelberg, assistant director of the Center for Public Policy Priorities, which advocates more spending on government-run health insurance programs in Texas, said the study's findings generally tracked the Census Bureau's annual estimates of the percentage of uninsured.

"We're No. 1 still," she said. "Given that we've lost some more ground probably with our public coverage, we wouldn't have expected our position to change."

Mary Katherine Stout, health care policy analyst at the Texas Public Policy Foundation, which advocates limited government and free-market solutions to social ills, said the nation's employer-based system of health coverage since World War II is "fracturing."

She said more government spending isn't the answer.

"If we really want to do something for our uninsured folks in Texas, it's about improving our private market, not expanding public programs," Ms. Stout said.

E-mail rtgarrett@dallasnews.com

Online at:

http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/news/texasouthwest/stories/DN-insurance_22tex.ART.State.Edition1.21b3b9e.html