

HEALTH CARE

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Health Care: News and Information is a service of the Healthcare Leadership Council (HLC) to help our readers stay fully informed about the latest health care issues as we work to advance a high-quality health care system.

Jim Edwards, Editor

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Census Uninsured Numbers Show Need for Better Use of Existing Options

The Census Bureau recently estimated that the number of people without health insurance rose in the past year.

- According to the Census Bureau, 47 million individuals were uninsured in 2006.
- The estimate put the one-year increase at about 2 million more than in 2005.
- The South had the highest uninsured rate, while the Midwest had the lowest.

These latest figures indicate that action is needed to make health coverage more accessible for working Americans.

- Especially, we must do more with existing public and private health coverage resources. These should be maximized instead of creating or expanding government-run health care.
- A top domestic priority should be making public health programs more efficacious and bringing private health coverage into reach for more working families.
- Research shows that eight of every 10 uninsured live in a household where at least one person has a job. So, improving these working households' ability to take advantage of employer-sponsored health benefits for the whole family would go a long way toward solving this problem.

We don't have to wait for Congress to act to start reducing the uninsured population.

- A significant number of the uninsured can be linked with viable health coverage options, private and public, through better outreach and education.
- The Healthcare Leadership Council has conducted a pilot project in seven cities this year. It's called Health Access America.

- With the help of local churches, civic groups, schools and health care providers, more than 26,000 people have attended health coverage information sessions. About half have enrolled in either private health coverage or a public health program.
- Polling shows that a majority of the uninsured doesn't know where to turn for information about health insurance. Health Access America proves that outreach and education can make a big difference.

The growth in the uninsured population isn't good news. But progress can be made to close the gap. Private initiatives like that of the Healthcare Leadership Council confirm this. Savvy outreach to the uninsured by itself, providing them with reliable information about public and private coverage options, makes a dent. Even greater strides are possible if those eligible for existing public health coverage programs are enrolled and if those in working families get help affording employer-based premiums.

The Healthcare Leadership Council, representing the innovators in each sector of the health care industry, is committed to advancing a market-based health care system that values innovation and provides affordable, high-quality care.

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