

# **HEALTH CARE**

## **NEWS AND INFORMATION**

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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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## **Expert Digs Beneath Health Care Statistics**

**A lot of statistics get tossed around in the health care debate. A Harvard economist held some of the key figures up to the light recently.**

- Professor Gregory Mankiw's New York Times op-ed examined three oft-cited statistics.
- Mark Twain said there are lies, damned lies and statistics. Professor Mankiw's analysis was a reminder that there can be more than meets the eye in a number wielded in policy debates.
- Figures that seem to prove "a lot of scary claims" about our health care system can do harm. "[T]he dangerous ones are those that are true but don't mean what people think they mean."

**The United States has lower life expectancy and higher infant mortality than Canada. But that doesn't make socialized medicine superior to market-based health care.**

- Canadian men live 2.6 years longer than American men, while Canadian women outlive their American counterparts by 2.3 years. U.S. infant mortality is 6.8 per 1,000 births, to Canada's 5.3.
- Social differences between the nations do more to explain the differences than health systems. Americans die more frequently by accident or homicide. Obesity also is more prevalent in the U.S. than Canada, and obesity leads to medical problems like heart disease.
- Our food delivery system "suppl[ies] high-calorie foods cheaply." That contributes to obesity. Low birth weight has a lot to do with infant mortality. Teenage motherhood relates to low birth weight, and three times more American teens give birth than do Canadian teens.

**The facts behind the statistic of 47 million uninsured usually go unmentioned by politicians pushing government-run health care.**

- "[T]he figure exaggerates the magnitude of the problem" because the uninsured population has extremely diverse personal circumstances.
- Some 18 million uninsured earn more than \$50,000 a year – meaning they're in the top half of earners. A fourth of the uninsured have turned down employer-offered coverage.

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- Americans who qualify for Medicaid but aren't enrolled are "uninsured in name only."

**Many government single-payer proponents decry rising the U.S. health spending rate. But health spending really "is the modern form of progress."**

- Mankiw calls today's 16 percent of the U.S. economy spent on health care "a symptom of success." In 1950, 5 percent of GDP went toward health care. Today's U.S. medical spending is linked to our high standard of living.
- Just half a century later, America has prospered, creating vast wealth as a society. We've invested much in medical research, reaping miraculous technological and medical breakthroughs.
- An expanding economy means "it makes sense to spend this growing prosperity on better health." Citing recent research: "As we grow older and richer, which is more valuable: a third car, yet another television, more clothing – or an extra year of life?"

**The American people are wise to subject statistics to scrutiny. This will be all the more important to keep in mind as election campaigns go farther and farther along. Health care policy will play a major role in next year's political debates. That makes it critical that we all understand what's actually represented by the numbers used in campaign rhetoric.**

*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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