

Study find millions of workers uninsured

Lack of coverage extends beyond the poor

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WASHINGTON (AP) -- More than one in five working adults in Texas and five other Southern and Southwestern states don't have health insurance, a new study says.

In another 37 states and the District of Columbia, at least one in every 10 working adults is uninsured, according to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which is leading a campaign to build support for expanding health coverage.

Organizers of the effort hope to alter public perception of health insurance as an issue that mainly affects the poor by emphasizing that the problem affects working families.

"I think this puts a different face on the uninsured. When people have a sense that it is someone like my neighbor -- or it could be me -- it does give you a different political face to work from," said Mary Greal, president of the Healthcare Leadership Council, an association of health care executives.

Ron Pollack, president of Families USA, a liberal consumer group, said the focus is now on "self-interest as well as altruism."

But unlike past attempts to extend coverage to everyone, getting more people insured has to occur in smaller steps, groups across the political spectrum say.

The most likely place to begin is in trying to cover the 8.5 million children without health insurance, they say.

Uninsured see doctors less

Former Presidents Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford are serving as co-chairmen for Cover the Uninsured Week. A coalition of diverse groups, including business, labor and several health organizations, has come together to push the issue in 1,500 events next week.

The campaign's organizers are pointing to 2005 -- without the distraction of a presidential campaign -- to press Congress to pass legislation to cover a chunk of the 43.6 million Americans who, according to the Census Bureau, lack insurance.

The study to be released Wednesday says nearly 20 million working Americans, many with families, are uninsured. More than a quarter of working Texans, 2.5 million people, have no insurance.

Other states in which more than a fifth of the work force is uninsured are: Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, New Mexico and Oklahoma.

The study was led by researchers at the University of Minnesota's School of Public Health that analyzed data from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Many studies have found that people without insurance are less likely to see doctors, more likely to be diagnosed with illnesses late and report being in poor or fair health more often than those with insurance.

The coalition sponsoring next week's activities, which includes health fairs and seminars, brings together groups often at odds with each other. They have pledged to set aside their differences to push for action on the issue.

Some other organizations involved are the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the AFL-CIO and America's Health Insurance Plans.

President Bush has proposed giving people tax credits to help them pay for insurance that they purchase on their own. Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry wants to extend health coverage to most uninsured Americans through a combination of insurance pools, tax credit and subsidies that he would pay for by raising taxes on the top 2 percent of taxpayers.

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