

CDC: Private health care coverage at 50-year-low

1 July 2009, By MIKE STOBBE , AP Medical Writer

(AP) -- The percentage of Americans who don't have private health insurance has hit its lowest mark in 50 years, according to two new government reports. About 65 percent of non-elderly Americans had private insurance in 2008, down from 67 percent the year before, according to preliminary data released Wednesday by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"It's bad news," said Kenneth Thorpe, a health policy researcher at Emory University.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, nearly 80 percent of Americans had private coverage, according to CDC officials.

Some experts blamed the faltering economy and corporate decisions to raise [health insurance](#) premiums - or do away with employee coverage - as the main drivers of the recent data.

However, public coverage of adults is rising in some states, due to programs like Medicaid expanding eligibility. So not all the adults without private coverage are uninsured, Thorpe said.

Indeed, the CDC estimated that about 44 million Americans were uninsured last year - nearly the same as CDC estimates for other recent years.

The CDC is one of at least three U.S. agencies that estimate the number of Americans without health insurance. The U.S. Census Bureau puts out what is perhaps the best-known number, but that agency's 2008 estimate is not due out until August.

Like the Census Bureau, the CDC's estimate is based on a survey. The CDC interviewed about 75,000 Americans last year, asking if they were uninsured at the time. About 15 percent said yes, leading to the estimate that about 44 million Americans were uninsured.

The drop in non-elderly adults with private health insurance was statistically significant, but the drop in children without private coverage was not. Health officials noted that public coverage of children has risen dramatically in the last ten years, and now more than one in three children are covered by a public plan.

The CDC also reported on insurance coverage in the 20 largest states, and found the percent of uninsured people ranged from 3 percent in Massachusetts to 23 percent in Texas. Lack of health insurance was greatest in the South and West.

Private coverage rates for people under age 65 ranged from 79 percent in Massachusetts to 56 percent in Florida, the CDC reported.

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On the Net:

The CDC reports: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs>

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