

Making Health Care Coverage Affordable and Accessible: **Why You Should Care**



Even if you are fully covered, your health care – the quality of care and how much you pay for it – is impacted when others lack health care insurance.

- More than 5 million residents in Texas currently have no health insurance. For them, this often results in a lack of access to primary care – like doctors' office visits and prenatal care – as well as preventive care, such as mammograms and immunizations for children. However, we all suffer the consequences in many ways.
- When uninsured individuals are sick, they often turn to hospital emergency rooms for help because they lack access to primary care. About 20 percent of all people who lack health insurance report turning to the ER for what is often general or routine care. In contrast, only 3 percent of those with insurance coverage use the ER for basic care. (Source: National Coalition on Health Care)
- Using hospital emergency rooms for non-critical care takes precious time and resources that doctors, nurses and other health care professionals could use to care for patients in urgent need of life-saving care.
- Ambulance diversion is another serious byproduct of high levels of uninsured and overcrowded emergency rooms. Ambulance diversions impact everyone. Prompt care in the midst of an emergency literally can be the difference between life and death.
- The average cost of a family health insurance policy has skyrocketed at a rate nearly three times faster than wages and inflation. In 2006, the average cost of a family health insurance policy was nearly \$11,500. This amount exceeds the annual income of a minimum-wage worker! Of that amount, families must cover nearly \$3,000 out of their own pockets while employers pick up the difference. (Source: "State of the States," Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2006)
- Hospitals spend billions of dollars every year to care for patients who have no health insurance and are unable to pay their hospital bills. Nationally, hospitals provide more than \$75 billion in uncompensated care. Texas hospitals alone spent more than \$10.1 billion in 2005 on uncompensated care.
- This places an enormous strain on hospitals' resources, including funding for emergency room care and the ability to have on-call physician specialists to cover the ER. In the end, access to care for every one of us may be compromised. (Additional information: American College of Emergency Physicians)
- The burden of uncompensated care ultimately is borne by individual Texans – as taxpayers, providers, employees and health care consumers. Our taxes pay for government-sponsored programs like Medicare, Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program. Local taxpayers help subsidize public hospitals – the safety net of the state's health care system. Employers play an important role in making health insurance coverage available, but inadequate payments from government programs shift part of the financial burden to those who can pay. That results in higher insurance premiums, and consumers are paying more out-of-pocket than ever before. Shifting the burden to providers and insured consumers does not solve the problem. (Source: Institute of Medicine, 2003/Families USA, 2005)



TEXAS HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION

This information courtesy of the Texas Hospital Association. For more information, contact THA's Communications Department at 512/465-1050 or via e-mail to info@tha.org.

- According to a statewide poll, 70 percent of Texans agree that hospitals will be able to provide better care to all patients if health care coverage were more accessible and affordable and more Texans were insured. (Source: Texas Hospital Association statewide survey, 2006)

Access to affordable health insurance continues to become more difficult for people from all walks of life.

- Lack of insurance coverage is beginning to affect middle- and higher-income Americans.
 - About two-thirds of uninsured Americans are classified as poor or near-poor (they earn less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level), while one-third of the uninsured are middle or higher income. (Source: Kaiser Commission, 2005)
 - Almost 70 percent of uninsured citizens either work or are part of a working family. That figure increases to 80 percent if the count includes part-time workers. (Source: Kaiser Commission, 2005)

The uninsured affect our state and nation in other ways, negatively impacting our productivity and economic potential.

- The U.S. loses between \$65 billion and \$130 billion each year in lost capital and productivity due to the costs associated with uncompensated care and with a loss in productivity. (Source: “Hidden Costs, Value Lost: Uninsurance in America,” Institute of Medicine, 2003)
- More than 40 percent of non-elderly uninsured adults have no regular source of care. Fearing high medical bills that they cannot pay, many delay or forgo needed medical care. Researchers estimate that a reduction in mortality of 5-15 percent could be achieved if the uninsured could gain access to continuous health insurance coverage. The Institute of Medicine estimates that at least 18,000 Americans die prematurely each year solely because they lack health insurance.

The Bottom Line?

Affordable, accessible health insurance coverage is good for our health, our pocketbooks and our quality of life.