

## **New Census Figures Show Number of Uninsured Increased in 2004, as Did Number Covered by Medicaid**

*Increase to 45.8 million is largely due to loss of job-based coverage*

**Source(s):** Julie Appleby, [USA Today](#) (Aug. 31); David Leonhardt, [The New York Times](#) (Aug. 31)

The [U.S. Census Bureau](#)'s annual report showed that the number of uninsured in the nation increased as the poverty rate rose, despite economic growth, reports the *New York Times*. Though the percentage of Americans without health insurance stood "roughly steady" at 16 percent (15.7%), a smaller percentage were covered by their employers and more were covered by Medicaid. The report found that the number of uninsured increased to 45.8 million in 2004, up from 45 million in 2003. *USA Today* reports population growth and 2 million more people getting insurance kept the percentage without coverage steady at 15.7 percent. The percentage of uninsured children also remained steady at 11.2 percent. Almost a third of Hispanics were uninsured, the same percentage as 2003 and the highest for any group.

The rising cost of health care benefits appears to be dampening pay increases, and employer-provided health benefits declined after four years of rapidly rising health costs, according to the *Times*. Job-based coverage dropped from 60.4 percent in 2003 to 59.8 percent last year, reports *USA Today*. Premiums paid by employers rose an average of 11.2 percent in 2004, according to a [Kaiser Family Foundation](#) survey, and have increased by more than 57 percent since 2000.

"This is a very troubling thing," said Paul Ginsburg, an economist at the [Center for Studying Health System Change](#). "The economy grew, more people had jobs, yet there was a decline in employer-based health insurance." Bush administration officials noted that the improvement in the job market since the end of 2004 would lead to rising incomes and falling poverty, reports the *Times*. However, Paul Fronstin, an economist at the [Employee Benefit Research Institute](#), said, "Health care costs ...

will continue to have an impact, even if the economy strengthens," reports *USA Today*.

Meantime, enrollment in Medicaid grew by 1.9 million, and enrollment in all government programs, including Medicare, also increased. These programs now cover 27.2 percent of the population, up from 26.6 percent in 2003. "We're seeing how public programs are helping offset what is happening on the employer-based side," said Kathleen Stoll, director of health policy for the liberal advocacy group [Families USA](#). She warned that some people could lose coverage if Congress makes a proposed \$10 billion cut to Medicaid.

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