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Thursday's Our View

Healthy outlook

Our Position: Iowa has long way to go on health care.

U.S. Census data that was released Monday contained some good news for Iowans. According to that report, Iowa is among the nation's leaders in having its citizens insured. The new U.S. Census figures showed the percentage of Iowans without health insurance was 9.1 percent during 2004-2005 - a drop from 10.4 percent in 2003-2004.

The figure puts Iowa third in the nation when it comes to having its citizens insured.

Nationwide, the number of people with health insurance coverage increased by 1.4 million to 247.3 million between 2004 and 2005, but the number without coverage also rose, by 1.3 million to 46.6 million, or 15.9 percent, Census data shows. That's worse than the recession year 2001 - figures reflecting the rising costs of health coverage and a lack of initiatives to help families and companies deal with those rising costs.

The data also shows that the number of uninsured children - again on a nationwide basis - increased between 2004 and 2005, from 7.9 million to 8.3 million. The increase in the number of uninsured children - percentage-wise, the number rose from 10.8 percent of those under 18 to 11.2 percent - could significantly increase health care costs down the road.

Bucking the nationwide trend, state statistics show a growing number of Iowa children are signed up for the state- and federally funded Hawk-I insurance program and Medicaid expansion program. This fiscal year, 34,598 children are registered, compared to 17,927 five years ago.

An analysis by the Iowa Policy Project shows that the number of people covered by government-funded insurance is growing. The number of Iowans with public health insurance also rose from 539,000 in 2000-01 to 747,000 in 2004-05, according to the Iowa Policy Project.

"The best we can say is that things are not worse for some Iowans," David Osterberg, executive director, told the Associated Press. "But more are in poverty, and we're not seeing improvement for middle-income Iowans or the uninsured."

Ida Johnson, executive director of United Neighbors Inc., in Davenport, an agency that assists those without insurance, said that while she welcomed the news contained in the census report, her agency is seeing more people asking for help.

"We're seeing extreme cases nowadays," she said. "Health care is one of the biggest issues we have to deal with."

While Iowa may rank well nationally, we have a long way to go in addressing the health care issue.

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