



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **New Census Data Show Increase in Utah's Uninsured, Raising Stakes for Utah's Health System Reform**

Salt Lake City-Released earlier today, U.S. Census data show a notable increase in Utah's uninsured rate, from 16.6% in 2005 to 17.4% in 2006. "This increase of nearly .8 % (420,000 individuals) is significant though certainly less dramatic than the 2.3% increase from 2004-2005," says Judi Hilman, Executive Director of UHPP. "Even though Utah continues to move in the wrong direction on this issue, we are optimistic for the first time about the prospects for real health reform in Utah.

On the path to real health reform we need to make sure we protect the current coverage programs (Medicaid, CHIP) in place for low-income people. Step one is to make sure the CHIP program is fully re-authorized by Congress by the September 30 deadline. The decrease in public coverage in Utah, from 21.2% to 19.6%, is most alarming in this regard, especially in comparison to the decrease in public coverage at the national level, from 27.3% to 27%. The uninsured rate for Utah children is 15%, much higher than the national rate of 11%, and this is because our CHIP program was closed for a good part of last year. What this means is that along the path to health reform we need to make sure that our most vulnerable are able to use cost effective programs like CHIP and Medicaid," says Hilman.

"Utah is blessed right now with a nation-leading economy and virtually full employment. It is unprecedented and incongruous to find that Utahns are increasingly uninsured during a time of strong economic growth. There is no better evidence that the traditional business model of health insurance no longer meets the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century American society," says Joseph Q. Jarvis, MD MSPH, chair, of the Utah Health Policy Project.

UHPP has formed [U-SHARE](#) (Utahns for Sustainable Health Reform and a Responsible Exchange) to make sure that the reforms are meaningful and affordable for all. U-SHARE will use the [Guiding Principles for Health Care Reform, Version 2.0](#), to highlight elements that should be included in any health reform package built around the concept of a Health Insurance Exchange (details in links above). The UHPP is working very closely with the United Way Financial Stability Council, Utah Department of Health, and Governor's Office of Economic Development, on the reform proposals.

*Important Note: members of the media should call Natalie Gochnour of the SL Chamber of Commerce to learn more about the reform proposal under development. Since the final reform proposal will not be presented to the public until September 26, she will say what can be said at this delicate stage of the reform process.*

According to Lincoln Nehring, UHPP Medicaid/CHIP Policy Director, “For the second year in a row the number of U.S. children without health care coverage has increased. Last year 11.7 percent of American children lacked health insurance, up from 10.9 percent in 2005. The increase can be attributed to the fact that private employer based health coverage continues to shed America’s kids from its roles while there is insufficient funding for safety net programs like CHIP. The percent of children with government health insurance (Medicaid/CHIP, Medicare, military health care), has remained relatively unchanged since 2004, at 29.8%. Yet the number and percent of children with employer based coverage went down between 2005 and 2006, from (60.9%) to (59.7%). This represents the 6th straight year of decline. These numbers show that fears that children are flocking from private coverage to government programs (i.e. “crowd out”) are totally unfounded. In fact, the rapid decline of employer based coverage and stagnation of Medicaid and CHIP enrollment demands that we strengthen and expand CHIP to ensure our kids can continue to receive health care. The Census numbers also highlight how irresponsible and damaging the Administration’s recent actions regarding CHIP are (i.e., the President’s veto threat of Congress’s CHIP reauthorization package; and the President’s and HHS Secretary Leavitt’s recently released CMS rules that will cause states to kick kids out of their CHIP programs and prevent states from using CHIP to help cover the nation’s ever growing number of uninsured children from working families).”

**Uninsured Rates, U.S. and Utah, 1995-2006**

Region	1995	2000	2004	2005		2006	
	%Uninsured	%Uninsured	%Uninsured	%Uninsured	Increase from 04	%Uninsured	Increase from 05
<b>Utah</b>	11.8%	12.5%	14.3	16.6%	<b>2.3%</b>	17.4%	<b>.8%</b>
<b>U.S.</b>	15.4%	14.2%	15.6%	15.3%	<b>-.3%</b>	15.8%	<b>.5%</b>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Utah’s uninsured rate far surpasses the national rate “because our economy is dominated by small businesses,” according to Hilman, “And it’s small business that feels the squeeze of health care costs. The good news is that small businesses are saying enough is enough...and our Governor’s number one priority is economic development...the stars are moving into alignment for real health system reform in Utah. “

For more information or to arrange interviews with our staff, U-SHARE partners, or uninsured individuals, please call (801) 433-2299 or e-mail [judi@healthpolicyproject.org](mailto:judi@healthpolicyproject.org).

For the Census Bureau's full report [click here](#).

About the Utah Health Policy Project...

**Our vision ... a health care system that provides medically necessary care to all Utah residents in a timely, efficient, and culturally effective manner *with sustainable financing***

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