

Census: 388,000 in Utah without health insurance

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By Randall Jeppesen and AP

The number of Utahns without health insurance is getting close to 400,000, according to new census bureau numbers. But what's being done to slow the problem?

Lincoln Nehring, with the Utah Health Policy Project, says a family without health insurance can be financially devastated when a serious illness hits. He also says the census bureau numbers that say 388,000 Utahns are uninsured were from surveys taken in 2005; he expects the number is likely much higher.

"Unfortunately the census bureau is just highlighting the enormous task that we have in front of us," he said.

Those figures include about 100,000 people more than state agencies have estimated and 40,000 more than advocates for the uninsured have forecast in the worst-case scenario.

According to the Utah Department of Health, comprehensive health insurance premiums in Utah have risen nearly 70 percent since 1999, or about 9 percent each year. The number of Utahns who have coverage has declined 13 percent since then.

Nehring says all the groups involved will have to make big systematic changes if they really want to see results. He says everyone from medical providers to individual families will need to take part in changes to help solve the problem.

The state health system task force assigned to tackle this problem meets Monday morning at the State Capitol to hear ideas of what can be done.

Utah Health Policy Project will also hold public meetings this month to talk about health care reform:

- Tuesday, Oct. 14, 5 p.m., Sandy Library, 10100 S. Petunia Way, small meeting room
- Wednesday, Oct. 15, 5 p.m., State Capitol Office Building, Room 4112
- Wednesday, Oct. 22, 5 p.m., Provo City Library, 550 N. University Ave., Room 302