



Ohio spent \$111.5 million in Medicaid for workers not in employer health plans

Published: Tuesday, September 02, 2008, 9:17 AM Updated: Tuesday, September 02, 2008, 11:40 AM



By **cseper**

AKRON -- A new report shows Ohio spent \$111.5 million in 2007 to cover Medicaid costs for workers who are not enrolled in employer health insurance plans.

Policy Matters Ohio, a liberal think tank in Cleveland, estimates the state covered more than 111,000 workers and their dependents from 50 companies with the highest Medicaid enrollment. The federal government covered \$182 million of the total cost. Researchers analyzed monthly Medicaid enrollment data to compile a list of statewide employers with the most employees who received government health assistance.

"Right now, we're in a very tight budget," said Piet van Lier, the study's author and a senior researcher at Policy Matters Ohio. "Medicaid is a very big expense -- not only for Ohio, but for other states -- and here's a substantial benefit going to employers."

Most of the employers included in the lists are retailers, restaurant chains and staffing firms.

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services warned that people should be careful not to jump to conclusions based on the Medicaid enrollment numbers.

"Eligibility for employer-sponsored health-care coverage does not preclude eligibility for Medicaid," the department said in a statement. "Several circumstances could lead people who are eligible for employer coverage to apply for and receive Medicaid."

Wal-Mart topped the list with a monthly average of 13,141 employees and dependents enrolled in Medicaid last year.

Wal-Mart spokesman Greg Rossiter said the rankings are "notoriously unreliable" and hard to verify. He said the company offers competitive benefits to hourly employees who work at least 34 hours a week, but some Wal-Mart employees only work part-time. The benefit structure varies depending on employment status, Rossiter said.

InfoCision, based in northeast Ohio, had a 64 percent increase in Medicaid-enrolled employees from 2004 to 2007, the most of any employers.

The Cleveland Clinic Health System ranked third with a 45 percent increase.

Officials with both companies attributed the increase to a period of rapid growth and hiring.

InfoCision, based in Bath Township, has about 3,000 employees in Ohio, an increase from 1,700 in 2004.

"We know our employees are coming to us from a wide variety of backgrounds," said Steve Brubaker, senior vice president of corporate affairs. "Some of those employees, perhaps, have been on public assistance and are transitioning to the work force and we think that's awesome. We can be, perhaps, a steppingstone for their future."

Every employee who works at least 30 hours a week is eligible for the company's health benefits after 90 days of employment, he said. The company's headquarters also offers an onsite fitness center and doctor's office.

At the Cleveland Clinic, 27,000 of the health system's 36,000 employees are enrolled in the company-sponsored health plan, said spokeswoman Eileen Sheil. Employees must work at least 20 hours to qualify for health coverage.

About 50 employees of the health system have children enrolled in Medicaid because the children are disabled, Sheil said.

Others, such as single parents who work in part-time positions, might opt for Medicaid coverage for their children because of extra benefits offered, such as transportation or help with groceries, she said.

Access to Care, a program that matches about 1,600 uninsured Summit County residents with volunteer doctors who provide their health care for free, said many of their enrollees work one or more part-time jobs that don't provide insurance.

Some enrollees place their children in Medicaid because it has higher family income limits for children to qualify.