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Number of uninsured Ohio kids unchanged since 2000 Adult coverage drops, highlighting need for health care reform

The number of uninsured Ohio children has stayed about the same since 2000, even as the number of uninsured adults under age 65 increased, according to U.S. Census Bureau data released today.

Employer-provided coverage of children fell by 16.1 percent over this period, and fewer children would have coverage today if public health coverage programs had not picked up the slack. Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) increased coverage by 17.9 percent, which kept the number of Ohio children without insurance at 178,436, or about 6.7 percent, statistically on par with the rate in 2000.

"We must reach all eligible but not currently enrolled children in Ohio," said Renuka Mayadev, executive director of Children's Defense Fund-Ohio. "A child's health is the platform on which to build strong bodies and minds."

The increase in the number of uninsured adults happened over a period when job-based coverage declined by 7.5 percent and Medicaid coverage expanded for this group by 4.1 percent. More than 1.3 million Ohio adults under the age of 65 were uninsured in 2012, a statistically significant increase of 3.4 percent, or 298,998 more adults, since the recession of 2006-07.

"Fewer and fewer employers offer insurance. When hard-working Ohioans lose their job-based coverage, most have nowhere to turn," said Hannah Halbert, workforce researcher for Policy Matters Ohio. "Thanks to the Affordable Care Act, that will change in 2014."

Starting on October 1, Ohioans who can't get affordable health insurance through their jobs but earn too much to qualify for Medicaid can sign up for coverage through the Ohio Health Insurance Exchange. The exchange will allow consumers to compare health-plan costs and benefits, and many will be eligible for federal subsidies to help them pay premiums and reduce out-of-pocket health costs. Additional gains could be made if our state would accept federal funds to expand Medicaid to Ohioans with incomes too high for Medicaid but too poor to qualify for the exchange.

"We have the chance to help those who cannot afford health insurance, while strengthening our state economy," said Halbert. "It would be a mistake to miss this opportunity to expand Medicaid."

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Policy Matters Ohio and the Children's Defense Fund are nonprofit, nonpartisan state policy research institutes with offices in Cleveland and Columbus. Findings are based on 2012 Current Population Survey data, with two-year averages used to overcome sample size limits.