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Census data show increase in uninsured, decline in employer-sponsored coverage in Connecticut

CT Voices calls for maintaining HUSKY health insurance program and expanding efforts to insure adults

There has been an increase in the number of working-age Connecticut residents who lack health insurance and a decrease in the number who get health insurance through their employers, according to data released today by the U.S. Census Bureau. However, there has been no statistically significant increase in the number of uninsured Connecticut children in recent years. Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based policy think tank, attributed the relative stability in the child uninsured rate in part to the success of the state's HUSKY health insurance program in enrolling uninsured children and their families.

“As families struggle through difficult economic times and fewer have access to health insurance through their jobs, we need to support health insurance programs that work, like HUSKY,” said Mary Alice Lee, Senior Policy Fellow at Connecticut Voices for Children. “We need to expand our state and national efforts to make sure that adults have the health insurance they need.”

Census data from the Current Population Survey reveal that there was a decline in the number of working-age Connecticut residents with health insurance over recent years. Based on a comparison of two-year average rates, there was a statistically significant increase in the percentage of people under age 65 who were without health insurance for the entire year, rising from 10.7% in 2006-2007 to 12.6% in 2008-2009. (Because of small survey sample sizes at the state level, two-year estimates should be used to evaluate trends over time in Connecticut.)

The Census data indicate that an estimated 13.7% (413,000) of all Connecticut residents under age 65 in 2009 were without health insurance for the entire previous year. Among Connecticut children under age 18, 7.7% (62,000) lacked insurance for the entire year. There was no statistically significant change in the percentage of Connecticut children who were uninsured in Connecticut over recent years. (No city- or county-level estimates for health insurance coverage, poverty, or income are available from this Census survey.)

There was also a statistically significant decline in the percentage of people under age 65 in Connecticut who had employer-sponsored health coverage over this decade, dropping from

78.2% in 1999-2000 to 70.7% in 2008-2009. There was a similar significant decrease in children who were covered by employer-sponsored insurance – from 77.7% in 1999-2000 to 69.9% in 2008-2009. There was no statistically significant change between the most recent two-year period (2008-2009) and the previous period (2006-2007).

Connecticut Voices for Children suggested that Connecticut's efforts to enroll more families in the HUSKY health insurance program probably helped to hold down the number of uninsured residents. In 2007 and 2008, income eligibility was increased for parents and pregnant women in the program. As a result of these eligibility expansions and the growing need for the program, enrollment of children, parents, and pregnant women in HUSKY increased by about 81,000 between July 2007 and July 2010. However, Connecticut Voices warned that this progress in enrollment could suffer if state policymakers make severe cuts to the HUSKY program to close the budget deficit next year. Connecticut Voices also credited the federal Recovery Act for helping to maintain HUSKY coverage in Connecticut by increasing aid to states for health insurance programs like HUSKY.

Nationally, the percentage of all working-age Americans who are uninsured has increased since 2008. In 2009, 18.8% of Americans under age 65 were uninsured (50 million), an increase from the 2008 rate (17.3%). Among children in the U.S., 10% (7.5 million) were uninsured in 2009, a rate that was not significantly different from the 2008 rate (9.9%). In addition, the percentage of Americans under age 65 with employer-sponsored health insurance coverage significantly decreased from 61.9% in 2008 to 58.9% in 2009 (156.5 million).

“As fewer people can access health insurance for themselves and their families through their jobs, the nation and the state need to strengthen and expand government-supported health care programs to ensure that all people have access to the health care that is vital to a stable workforce,” commented Jane McNichol, Executive Director of the Legal Assistance Resource Center of Connecticut.

“We are not surprised that the number of uninsured has gone up, as the unemployment rate in Bridgeport is 13.7%. In these critical times, it is critical that the state maintain HUSKY benefits and not make cuts to balance the budget. We are also confident that as Connecticut's health reform law, SustiNet, and national health reform is implemented, affordable health care can be within everyone's reach,” commented Mary Pat Healy, Executive Director, Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition.

National and state-level data on health insurance coverage are available on the U.S. Census Web site at www.census.gov. Health insurance data are drawn from the Current Population Survey (CPS). **See the attached fact sheet for detailed survey results and background on its measures.** This news release and fact sheet are also available on the CT Voices Web site at www.ctkidslink.org.

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Connecticut Voices for Children is a research-based policy think tank that works to advance strategic public investment and wise public policies to benefit our state's children, youth and families.

Other data from Census sources: National and some state-level poverty and income data are available from the Current Population Survey. However, for several years, the Census Bureau has advised that data from the American Community Survey (ACS) should be used for state-level poverty and income estimates, rather than CPS data. This is because the ACS surveys more people than the CPS and offers a more reliable measure. Therefore, CT Voices for Children is not reporting on state-level CPS poverty and income data. (CT Voices has these data available on request.) The Census will publicly release state-level poverty and income estimates from the ACS on Tuesday, September 28. Poverty, income, and uninsured estimates will also be available for the eight largest cities in the state. (No city-level estimates for health insurance coverage, poverty, or income are available from the CPS.) CT Voices plans to summarize these ACS state- and local-level data in a separate news release on September 28.

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