

For Immediate Release

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For More Information, Contact:

Joy Margheim (503) 873-1201
Charles Sheketoff (503) 873-1201
Juan Carlos Ordóñez (503) 873-1201

Census Data Show No Oregon Progress in Expanding Health Coverage or Reducing Poverty

(Silverton) — U.S. Census Bureau data released today showed that Oregon failed to make progress in expanding health coverage or reducing poverty in 2007-08. But over the course of the decade, Oregon has witnessed a significant erosion in health coverage, according to the Oregon Center for Public Policy's analysis of the data.

"Today's data is a timely message to Oregon's congressional delegation about the urgent need for national health reform, creating a system that provides affordable and comprehensive coverage to every American," said Margheim.

Current Population Survey results released today by the Census Bureau estimated that 626,500 Oregonians — 16.5 percent of the state's population — lacked health insurance in 2007-08.

Nationwide, the latest Census data reported that 15.4 percent of Americans lacked health insurance in 2008.

Margheim warned that because the worst of the recession-driven job losses in Oregon occurred in late 2008 and into 2009, the share of Oregonians today without health insurance is likely higher than today's Census data show. Most Oregonians depend on their employers for their health insurance, and those who lose their jobs often find it prohibitively expensive to maintain coverage, Margheim said.

Since the start of the decade, the share of Oregon workers and their families who get their health insurance from employers has contracted, according to OCPP. Their analysis of Census data showed that in 2007-08 62.8 percent of workers and their families received health coverage from employers, down from 66.4 percent in 2000-01, a similar point in the last business cycle.

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“I would not be surprised if next year we see further decline given the severity of the downturn in the months following collection of the survey released today,” said Margheim.

While the latest data showed no statistically significant change in the percentage of Oregonians without health insurance since 2005-06, the share of uninsured was significantly higher than the 12.3 percent registered at the start of the decade, according to OCPP.

But this year, Oregon has taken an important step to expand health coverage, said Margheim, citing the actions of the Governor and the 2009 legislature in the enactment of the Healthy Kids legislation. That program will pay for health coverage for 80,000 Oregon children in 2009-2011.

“The expanded kids’ coverage, coupled with the modest expansion of the Oregon Health Plan for working poor adults and the establishment of the Oregon Health Authority, gives us hope that the tide will turn in favor of lowering the rate of those without insurance,” she added.

Margheim regretted that Oregon so far has not taken similar positive steps in confronting its “stubborn poverty rate.”

The Census reported that 11.7 percent of Oregonians were poor in 2007-08. An OCPP analysis of the Census data determined that 4.3 percent of full-time working families with children in Oregon lived in poverty during the same period.

Neither the overall poverty rate nor the poverty rate among working families with children represents a statistically significant change from 2005-06 or from the start of the decade, according to OCPP.

“This decade Oregon has made no progress in reducing the share of working families in poverty,” said Margheim. “The Governor and legislature need to use the same vigor that they’ve demonstrated in addressing lack of health coverage among kids in confronting Oregon’s poverty problem.”

The Current Population Survey, which contacts approximately 1,000 households statewide, provides information about trends in poverty and incomes over time and is the primary source for information about health insurance coverage for Oregon. The Census Bureau and the Oregon Center for Public Policy report state findings as two-year averages, which are more reliable than single-year estimates.

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Additional estimates of poverty and income in Oregon will become available later this month when the Census Bureau releases the results of a different survey, the American Community Survey.

The Oregon Center for Public Policy is a non-partisan research institute that does in-depth research and analysis on budget, tax and economic issues. The Center's goal is to improve decision making and generate more opportunities for all Oregonians.