

Survey: Disparities in health coverage for Minnesota kids

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ST. PAUL, Minn. - Despite Minnesota's ranking as third in the nation in the percentage of people who have health insurance, a new survey indicates some disparities for kids in the state.

The U.S. Census Bureau's annual American Community Survey looked closely at health insurance coverage for the first time in 2008. Overall, just 8.7 percent of Minnesotans, just over one in 12, don't have health insurance, but that's not true everywhere; there are pockets across the state where children have less coverage than adults.

Glenda Cartney, a registered nurse, says that despite huge improvements in technology, the health care system has deteriorated. Recently, four out of 10 patients in her ward were there because they couldn't afford their medications.

"What that does, you know, it just drives our health care costs up because here's somebody that's not insured, no longer can take his medications, and is back in for more procedures. That just saddens me."

Nearly one in six people in Minneapolis lacks health insurance coverage, almost twice the state average. St. Paul and Duluth fared slightly better, with one of 16 uninsured, though one child in eight in Duluth has no health insurance.

Dr. Mark Liebow of the Mayo Clinic says there's a lot of resistance to health care reform, but first and foremost, we need to insure the uninsured.

"Two percent of all the deaths in the United States each year are due to uninsurance, disease that isn't getting treated or isn't getting treated right, because people don't have insurance."

Dr. Liebow said he hopes that health care reform will also mean changing the health insurance market and bettering the delivery system. The American Community Survey data also show about six in every seven Minnesotans with health insurance are covered by private plans, rather than public health insurance, a higher rate than the rest of the country.

Opponents of major health care reform say current reform proposals are too expensive, and are examples of an increasing government role in Americans' lives.

For survey information go to www.census.gov