



PRESS RELEASE

August 28, 2007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Census Data Shows Drop in Health Insurance Rate, No Decrease in Poverty

ALBUQUERQUE—New data released today by the U.S. Census Bureau shows a negligible drop in poverty nationwide, but any decrease is mitigated by an increase in the numbers of people who do not have health insurance.

The national poverty rate was 12.5 percent for 2005-06 – that's down .1 percent from 2003-04. New Mexico actually saw a .1 percent increase during that time period, for a 2005-06 average of 17.4 percent.

While those changes are not statistically significant, the changes in health insurance status are.

In New Mexico, the rate of people under the age of 65 who do not have health insurance rose from 23 percent in 2005 to 26 percent in 2006, according to Census data.

"New Mexico's economy has seen some remarkable growth this year, so it's disturbing to see so many more people without health insurance," said Gerry Bradley, Research Director for NM Voices.

New Mexico has the second highest rate of uninsured residents in the country. Only Texas is worse. Our overall rate of uninsured – which includes people over the age of 65 – is 21 percent. The overall rate is lower because seniors are covered by Medicare. Nationally, that rate is 16 percent.

"The numbers translate to almost 450,000 New Mexicans who have no insurance and little if any access to primary and preventive health care. That's more than four times the population of Las Cruces. This is not a trend that bodes well for the future of our economy," Bradley added.

"Our system of employer-sponsored health insurance is becoming less and less sustainable," said Eric Griego, Executive Director of NM Voices. "The high cost of private insurance is a barrier to entrepreneurship, and for a state whose economy relies very heavily on small business, that is a real problem.

"When the Legislature meets again in January, they have an opportunity to reform the system and provide guaranteed health coverage. We hope they do what's best for all New Mexicans," Griego added.

The data comes from the Current Population Survey (CPS). The Census Bureau releases data on poverty rates every August. It can be found at <http://www.census.gov/>.

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New Mexico Voices for Children is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization advocating for policies to improve the health and well-being of New Mexico's children, families and communities.
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