

Idaho Business Review, Wednesday, Aug. 27, 2008

Insured Idahoans Stays Stable

Federal report says 14.6 percent have no health insurance

The proportion of Idahoans without health insurance remained essentially unchanged between 2004-2005 and 2006-2007 even though employers reported scaling back their offers of health benefits to their workers. A new Census Bureau report issued Aug. 26 estimated that 14.6 percent of Idahoans were without health insurance in 2006-2007 compared to an estimated 14.7 percent in 2004-2005. Idaho bucked the trend as 32 states posted increases in percentages of people without health insurance, the Idaho Department of Labor said in a release. Nationally, the proportion of uninsured people rose from 15.1 percent to 15.5 percent.

Holding the rate of uninsured steady over the period coincided with the findings of the biennial 2007 Idaho Fringe Benefits Survey where employers reported they cut back health care benefits for the second straight time, state labor officials said.

Idaho's 2007 survey of 1,500 randomly selected employers found only 63 percent offered some form of health care coverage to full-time employees - down from 74 percent in 2005 and 82 percent in 2002. Part-time workers were hit just as hard. Employers reported offering medical coverage to only 9 percent of their part-timers in 2007, down from 19 percent in 2005 and 27 percent in 2002.

The Census Bureau report pointed out that 25 percent of Idahoans had some form of government health coverage in 2007 - Medicaid, Medicare or the military program - and 10 percent of people under 65 purchased their own medical insurance. The Bureau also estimated the poverty rate for 2006-2007 at 9.7 percent, not significantly lower than the rate for 2004-2005. The period covered by the report was one of the most expansive for the Idaho economy in decades, the Idaho Department of Labor said.

But household income, according to the report, rose just 1.1 percent, barely half of the national increase of 2 percent. The Census Bureau estimated median household income at \$48,354, up from an inflation-adjusted \$47,805 in 2004-2005. That means half the households had higher incomes and half had lower.

This figure differs from the average annual wage because it includes multiple wage-earners in a single household as well as unearned income such as investment returns, pensions and Social Security payments, the Idaho Department of Labor said.

While Idaho's average annual wage ranks 45 among the states, its median household income for 2006-2007 ranked 28th nationally.