

Health Insurance Coverage in Arkansas Keeps Shrinking as Premiums, Family Costs Continue Climbing

Medical care has become too expensive in Arkansas, leaving 485,849 state residents uninsured and exposed to the catastrophic costs of accidents and illnesses.¹ The economic downturn that began 19 months ago has vaporized 7 million jobs across the U.S. and driven the Arkansas unemployment rate to 6.5 percent from 4.9 percent.² More families are finding themselves without health benefits just as the cost of buying coverage on the open market has climbed to record levels.³

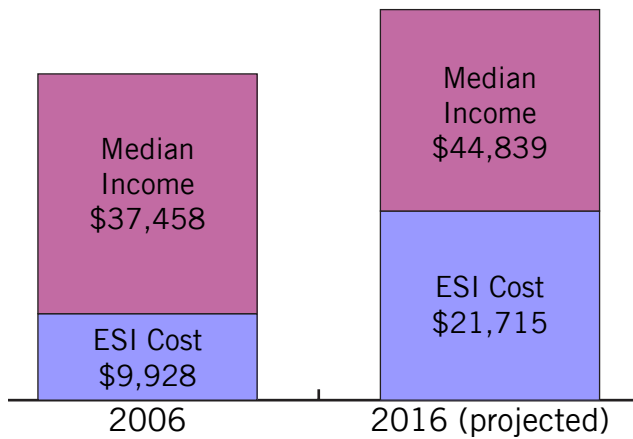
While the employed take comfort in holding on to their jobs, thousands of workers at small businesses in Arkansas and millions more nationwide remain uninsured because the price of comprehensive health insurance has soared out of reach. And across the nation more than half of Americans whose jobs and benefits are intact nonetheless live in fear of becoming sudden casualties of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.⁴ Health insurance premiums have risen so high that experts forecast 52 million Americans will be without coverage next year.⁵ Left alone to purchase coverage directly from private health insurance companies, families often have no choice but to remain uninsured or buy policies with meager benefits.

Arkansas Data Points

- Health insurance premiums for Arkansas working families have skyrocketed, increasing 66 percent from 2000 to 2007.⁶
- For family health coverage in Arkansas during that time, the average annual combined premium for employers and employees rose from \$6,355 to \$10,534.⁷
- The combined cost to employers and workers of health insurance for a family of four is equal to 27 percent of the Arkansas median family income. Given current trends, that share will grow to 48 percent in 2016.⁸
- The full cost of employer-sponsored health insurance in Arkansas is projected to grow at an annual rate of 8.1 percent, compared to a 1.4 percent growth rate for income.⁹
- About 260,000 working non-elderly adults in Arkansas do not have health insurance. That makes up 64 percent of the total non-elderly uninsured population.¹⁰
- In Arkansas 9.5 percent of working adults spent 20 percent or more of their income on out-of-pocket health care expenses in 2004, a 40 percent increase from three years earlier.¹¹
- For family health coverage in Arkansas, the average employer's portion of annual premiums rose 56 percent, and the average worker's share grew by 91 percent.¹²
- From 2000 to 2007, the median earnings of Arkansas workers increased 12 percent, from \$20,328 to \$22,692. During that time health insurance premiums for Arkansas working families rose 5.7 times faster than median earnings.¹³
- In Arkansas 485,849 people were uninsured in 2007.¹⁴
- The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that 6.5 percent of Arkansas's labor force was unemployed in April 2009.¹⁵
- A recent report estimated that 62 percent of bankruptcies were directly related to medical bills; in Arkansas there were 13,489 non-business bankruptcies in 2008.^{16,17}

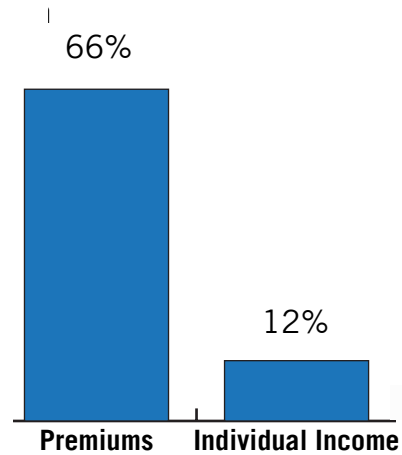
Arkansas Premiums vs. Income

Cost of Arkansas employer sponsored insurance (ESI) compared to median household income - 2006 and projected 2016 (assuming no meaningful health reforms)



Source: New America Foundation, "The State of State Health: The Cost of Failure (2007)."

Percent Increase in Premiums Versus Income in Arkansas 2000-2007



Source: Families USA, "Premiums Versus Paychecks," September 2008.

Endnotes

¹ Kaiser Family Foundation, "Health Insurance Coverage of the Total Population, states (2006-2007), U.S. (2007)." Accessed at <http://www.statehealthfacts.org/comparebar.jsp?ind=125&cat=3>.

² United States Department of Labor, "Economy at a Glance," 2009. Accessed at <http://www.bls.gov/eag/>.

³ Bureau of Labor Statistics, "The Employment Situation: May 2009," June 2009. Accessed at <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm>.

⁴ Kaiser Family Foundation, "Kaiser Health Tracking Poll," February, 2009. Accessed at <http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/upload/7866.pdf>.

⁵ Todd P. Gilmer, Richard G. Kronick, "Hard Times And Health Insurance: How Many Americans Will Be Uninsured By 2010?" Health Affairs 28, no. 4 (2009): w573-w577.

⁶ Families USA, "Premiums versus Paychecks," September 2008. Accessed at <http://www.familiesusa.org/resources/publications/reports/premiums-vs-paychecks-2008.html>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ New America Foundation, "The State of State Health: The Cost of Failure (2007)." Accessed at <http://statehealth.newamerica.net/>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Peter Harbage, Ben Furnas, "Health Care in Crisis," Center for American Progress, May 4, 2009. Accessed at http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2009/05/working_uninsured_map.html.

¹¹ The State Health Access Data Assistance Center, "State Profiles," Robert Wood Johnson Program. Accessed at <http://www.shadac.org/content/state-profiles>.

¹² Families USA, "Premiums versus Paychecks," September 2008. Accessed at <http://www.familiesusa.org/resources/publications/reports/premiums-vs-paychecks-2008.html>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Kaiser Family Foundation, "Health Insurance Coverage of the Total Population, states (2006-2007), U.S. (2007)." Accessed at <http://www.statehealthfacts.org/comparebar.jsp?ind=125&cat=3>.

¹⁵ Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Local Area Unemployment Statistics," May 22, 2009. Accessed at <http://www.bls.gov/web/lauhsthl.htm>.

¹⁶ David Himmelstein, et al., "Medical Bankruptcy in the United States, 2007: Results of a National Study," The American Journal of Medicine, 2009. Accessed at http://pnhp.org/new_bankruptcy_study/Bankruptcy-2009.pdf.

¹⁷ US Bankruptcy Courts, "Table F2: Business and Nonbusiness Bankruptcy Cases Commenced, by Chapter of the Bankruptcy Code: During the Twelve Month Period Ending Dec. 31 2008." Accessed at <http://www.uscourts.gov/bnkrpctstats/statistics.htm>.