

PRESS RELEASE

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FAILURE TO ADOPT HEALTH REFORM WILL LEAD TO 7,600 PREMATURE DEATHS IN MICHIGAN IN THE NEXT DECADE

Michigan Ranks Tenth Nationally in Number of Premature Deaths that Would Occur Due to Lack of Health Coverage

Washington, D.C.—The failure to enact health care reform this year will lead in the next decade to approximately 7,600 premature deaths of people between 25 and 64 years old in Michigan according to a report released today by the consumer health group Families USA.

At the national level the report, “Lives on the Line: The Deadly Cost of Delaying Health Reform,” warns that the number of deaths would grow from 68 per day in 2010 to 84 per day in 2019.

Ron Pollack, Executive Director of Families USA, said the report quantifies these needless deaths as the most tragic and heartbreaking consequence of going without health insurance. While thousands of families across our nation directly feel the pain of this loss, the ongoing tragedy is too often invisible to the general public.

“When the people of this nation witness a tragic event that leads to multiple deaths, we raise our voices in indignation, and the nation rallies in response,” Pollack said. “We cry out for investigations. We seek causes. We call for swift punishment for the guilty, and removal of the inept. Yet, unseen, hundreds of thousands will die needlessly and prematurely over the next decade because our terribly flawed health care system excludes these ordinary Americans.”

Michigan League for Human Services President & CEO Sharon Parks said Michigan is experiencing a rapid rise in the number of uninsured along with strained resources. Medicaid provider payments have been cut 8 percent in the past year and more cuts are likely in the coming year. Even for those who qualify, access is a problem, especially when specialty care is required.

“Many, many families in Michigan know the pain of job loss and the additional salt in the wound of losing health insurance,” she said. “We don’t have the public resources needed to pay for medical coverage for those who no longer have incomes and private health insurance. Our system is strained to the breaking point.”

The Families USA report applies the methodology developed in the groundbreaking report by the prestigious Institute of Medicine (IoM) to estimate national and state deaths due to lack of health coverage. The IoM found that approximately 18,000 non-elderly adults died in the year 2000 due a lack of health coverage. The Urban Institute updated this number and found that at least 22,000 died prematurely due to a lack of health coverage in the year 2006.

The Families USA report states that:

- In the 15 years since health care reform was last debated (1995-2009), more than 290,000 American adults (25-64 years old) died prematurely due to a lack of health coverage.
- The following 12 states experienced the largest number of premature deaths due to a lack of coverage over the 15-year period 1995-2009: California (38,400), Texas (32,200), Florida (24,400), New York (18,800), Georgia (10,900), Illinois (10,800), North Carolina (9,600), Ohio (9,500), Pennsylvania (8,700), Louisiana (8,200), New Jersey (7,800) and MICHIGAN (7,500).
- If Congress fails to pass health reform, the number of Americans who will lose their lives will continue to grow. In the next 10 years (2010-2019), more than another 275,000 adults will die prematurely due to a lack of health insurance coverage across the nation.
- The following 10 states are projected to have the largest number of premature deaths due to a lack of coverage over the next 10 years: California (34,600), Texas (31,700), Florida (25,400), New York (13,900), Georgia (11,500), North Carolina (9,600), Illinois (9,400), Ohio (8,900), Louisiana (7,700), MICHIGAN (7,600), Pennsylvania (7,500), and Tennessee (7,500).
- Every day in 2010, approximately 68 non-elderly adult Americans will die prematurely due to lack of health coverage across the nation. If health reform fails, that number will grow to 84 Americans dying every day by 2019.

The link between a lack of health coverage and premature death occurs for several reasons:

- The uninsured are less likely to have a usual source of care outside the emergency room;
- The uninsured often go without screenings and preventive care;
- The uninsured often delay or forgo needed medical care.

“Failure to pass health care reform—in effect, doing nothing to make health coverage and care affordable—results in a huge and terrible cost,” Pollack said. “We can measure that cost in many important terms like escalating health care costs and unaffordable increases in premiums, but we should recognize the ultimate, inexcusable consequence—lost lives.

“The grim reality is that the failure of Congress to pass health reform has deadly consequences. If Congress doesn’t move health reform across the finish line, we may continue to pay in tragic, unnecessary deaths for years to come,” he said.

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Families USA is the national organization for health care consumers. It advocates for high-quality, affordable health coverage for everyone.

The Michigan League for Human Services is a statewide, nonprofit, nonpartisan policy and advocacy group for low-income residents. It has a network of more than 1,500 from business, labor, human service professions and faith-based organizations as well as concerned citizens.

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