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ONE OUT OF THREE NON-ELDERLY AMERICANS WERE UNINSURED DURING 2002-2003

*82 Million People, Including Many in the Middle Class,
Were Uninsured At Some Point Over The Past Two Years;
Most Were Uninsured For At Least Nine Months*

Washington, D.C. - Approximately 81.8 million Americans -- one out of three people under 65 years of age -- were uninsured at some point of time during 2002-2003, according to a report released today by the health consumer organization Families USA.

The report, based mainly on Census Bureau data, showed that most of these uninsured individuals lacked coverage for lengthy periods of time: Almost two-thirds (65.3 percent) were uninsured for six months or more; and over half (50.6 percent) were uninsured for at least nine months.

In 14 states, more than one out of three non-elderly people went without health insurance for all or part of 2002-2003. Texas had the highest rate with 43.4 percent of the non-elderly population uninsured. The other 13 states are: New Mexico (42.4%); California (37.1%); Nevada (36.8%); Louisiana (36.2%); Arizona (35.7%); Mississippi (35.1%); Oklahoma (35.0%); Alaska (35.0%); Florida (34.6%); Arkansas (34.4%); Idaho (33.8%); North Carolina (33.7%); and New York (33.4%).

"One out of three non-elderly Americans without health insurance constitutes an enormous epidemic that requires immediate attention," said Ron Pollack, Executive Director of Families USA. "It is high time that this problem rises to the top of our national agenda."

Four out of five of the uninsured were in working families, according to the report. Of those working families, the report found that significant portions of the middle class were uninsured. For example, among people with incomes between 300 and 400 percent of the federal poverty level (between \$55,980 and \$74,640 in annual income for a family of four in 2003), more than one out of four were uninsured over the past two years.

"The growing number of Americans without health insurance is now a phenomenon that significantly affects middle class and working families," said Pollack. "As a result, this problem is no longer simply an altruistic issue affecting the poor, but a matter of self-interest for almost everyone."

According to the Families USA report, the states with the largest number of uninsured people in the last two years were California (11.9 million), Texas (8.5 million), New York (5.6 million), Florida (4.8 million), Illinois (3.5 million), Pennsylvania (2.8 million), Ohio (2.8 million), Michigan (2.5 million), Georgia (2.5 million), and North Carolina (2.4 million).

Although almost half of the uninsured were non-Hispanic whites, the report found that there were huge disparities in the uninsured rate based on race. Approximately 23.5 percent of non-Hispanic whites were uninsured in the past two years, compared to 42.9 percent for non-Hispanic blacks and 59.5 percent for Hispanics.

A select group of Governors and House Members spoke at today's press conference to unveil the findings of the report. Iowa Governor Tom Vilsack, Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius, Maine Governor John Baldacci, and Congresswoman Hilda Solis (CA), the Chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Task Force on Health, were among those at the event.

"As Families USA's prescient study states, there are considerably larger numbers of people who are without health insurance at different times than popularly believed. This means an even greater number of people are without guaranteed health care security. This is a reflection of an economy that is still not on solid ground. And it is a call to action to ensure that government programs that provide health care remain solvent and viable," said Governor Vilsack.

Governor Sebelius indicated the stakes involved in being uninsured: "Tens of millions of Americans -- and hundreds of thousands of Kansans -- are regularly risking their health and financial security because the cost of health insurance is too often out of their reach," she said.

Governor Baldacci, who pushed his State to implement a comprehensive program designed to achieve universal health coverage called the "Dirigo" Health Plan described the need for his State's unique program: "In Maine, health reform is a necessity. We brought all the stakeholders together and created Dirigo Health, our solution to fix a broken system. Our goal is universal access to affordable and quality coverage within five years," said Baldacci.

The Families USA report was based on data from the Census Bureau. Last year the Census Bureau, when it released its Current Population Survey (CPS), estimated that there were 43.6 million uninsured people. That number reflects responses to the CPS survey asking respondents if they did not have health insurance for the previous entire calendar year. The Families USA report data are drawn from the Census Bureau's most recent Survey of Income and Program Participation as well as the CPS, and it reflects how many people were uninsured at some point over the past two years. The 81.8 million uninsured number does not double count people who were uninsured in 2002 and 2003.

For a copy of the report or for state fact sheets please visit our Web site at www.familiesusa.org.

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Families USA is the national organization for health care consumers. It is nonprofit and nonpartisan and advocates for high-quality, affordable health care for all Americans.