

On October 8, the Commonwealth fund published a study in conjunction with Rutgers University that provides a state-by-state comparison of health care in the United States. The study measured 38 health indicators in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The indicators are grouped by access, prevention and treatment, avoidable hospital use and costs, equity, and healthy lives. The results indicate that geographical location can be a predictor of the population's health.

While there were national gains in areas such as children's coverage and quality of care, California fell behind in many indicators. Besides ranking 5th in overall health due to low infant mortality (6th) and a low number of smokers (2nd), California ranked in the bottom quartile for 11 indicators, and the lowest five states for four indicators.

California ranked 47th in the rate of uninsured working-age adults (ages 18-64), with an estimated 22.4% uninsured. In addition, the state ranked 33rd in percentage of adults who could not afford to see a doctor, 42nd in prevention and treatment (up from 50th in 2007), 22nd in avoidable hospital use and costs, and 39th in equity. In 2007, California ranked 32nd in median household income. In indicators such as access to health care and prevention and treatment, California ranked in the bottom ten states.

Overall, the state ranked 31st in its summary of health system performance across dimensions. Whilst we can applaud our high ranking in overall healthy lives, our unacceptably low rankings in other categories must be addressed.

Even more alarming is that some data was collected prior to the economic downturn, which began to take effect in December of 2007. With California being one of the hardest hit states during the recession and with state budget cuts resulting in a loss of federal matching dollars for programs like CHIP, the future of health care in our state looks grim.

As the national debate on health care reform continues and our state budget situation continues to cripple our state's health care, this study provides key information indicating the immediate need for a health care overhaul.

Sources:

D. McCarthy, S. K. H. How, C. Schoen, J. C. Cantor, D. Belloff, Aiming Higher Results from a State Scorecard on Health System Performance, 2009, The Commonwealth Fund, October 2009. Accessed on October 9, 2009 from:

http://www.commonwealthfund.org/~media/Files/Publications/Fund%20Report/2009/Oct/1326_McCarthy_state_scorecard_2009_full_report_FINAL.pdf

B. C. Calvan. State mostly fails to measure up in health care. The Sacramento Bee, October 8, 2009. Accessed on October 9, 2009 from: <http://www.sacbee.com/273/story/2239136.html>