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# Los Angeles Times Business

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## Number of Americans without health insurance falls

**The Census Bureau says the 2007 decrease is mostly due to expanded government coverage for children.**

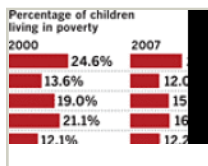
By Lisa Girion, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer  
August 27, 2008

Thanks mostly to expanded government health coverage for children, the number of people without health insurance fell in 2007 for the first time since President Bush took office, the U.S. Census Bureau said Tuesday.

In all, the number of people without health insurance dropped last year to 45.7 million, from 47 million in 2006, according to the bureau's annual report on income, poverty and health insurance. That's a drop to 15.3% of Americans from 15.8%.



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Some healthcare experts had expected the number of uninsured to increase as the long-term erosion of private, employment-based coverage continued. Instead, the figures showed a shift toward government coverage that added fuel to the debate over how to best expand access to healthcare.

"This is good news and is entirely attributable to the availability of government programs like Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program [SCHIP]," said Lynn Blewett, a health services analyst with the State Health Access Data Assistance Center at the University of Minnesota. "Programs like SCHIP and Medicaid are lifelines for providing Americans with the healthcare they need, especially during times when the economy is soft and more people feel vulnerable to losing employer-sponsored health insurance."

Overall, the number of people covered by government programs rose to 83 million in 2007, up from 80.3 million in 2006. The number of people on Medicaid, the government health insurance program for low-income residents, increased to 39.6 million from 38.3 million. And the number of children without insurance dropped to 8.1 million from 8.7 million as those with public insurance rose by almost 1 million to 23 million.

By contrast, the rate of private health insurance coverage slid to 67.5% of U.S. residents in 2007, down from 67.9% a year earlier. The total number of people with private coverage was statistically unchanged at 202 million. The employment-based insurance rate fell to 59.3% from 59.7%, but the number of people covered by such plans was statistically steady at 177.4 million.

The figures are based on data collected in 2007 and are being overshadowed by a projected decline in public coverage for children as households, employers and government agencies tighten their belts.

In California alone, an estimated 19,000 children could lose coverage because of a recent decision to increase premiums for Health Families, the state version of SCHIP, by \$2 to \$3 per child. An additional 196,000 children are expected to be dropped from Medi-Cal, the state version of Medicaid, over two years because of new

