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Health insurance for workers declines

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By RACHEL C. DOVE

Staff Writer

CHARLESTON - According to a report released today by the Economic Policy Institute, employer-sponsored health insurance has declined for the tenth year in a row nationwide, from 59.4 percent in 2009 to 54.6 percent in 2011.

"As the labor market continued to deteriorate, fewer American families were able to obtain health insurance through the workplace, which caused many to fall through the cracks," said Elise Gould, Director of Health Policy Research at EPI and author of the report. "A robust labor market and strong safety net are critical in ensuring the economic security and overall well-being of families across the country."

According to the report, many people became uninsured in 2010 and 2011 because of the high unemployment rate. Many more would have been without insurance were it not for provisions in the Affordable Care Act.

The state saw a change of 4.4 percentage points during the same period as it went from 65 percent to 60.6 percent, representing 44,516 employees. West Virginia ranks thirtieth among all states in the highest percent of its workforce that receives employer-sponsored health insurance. Between 2001 and 2010, 15 states saw a decline greater than 10 percent; 28 states saw a decline between 5 and 10 percent; and seven states (including West Virginia) saw declines of less than 5 percent.

"This is why we need the Affordable Care Act," said Renate Pore, Health Policy Director with West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy. "It will give employers and employees more affordable health insurance options beginning in 2014 and it will help entrepreneurs and small business owners."

The West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy is part of The Economic Analysis and Research Network (EARN), a network of state and regional multi-issue research, policy and advocacy organizations. The network currently includes 57 organizations in 42 states.

EPI coordinates EARN, and the groups work with a broad range of other national organizations.

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