

## Think tank sizes up W.Va. employment

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CHARLESTON, W.Va. (AP) — A report by the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy concludes the state lost 21,300 jobs during the Great Recession and would have to add 27,000 jobs to regain its pre-recession employment rate.

The think tank's findings are contained in the report "The State of Working West Virginia 2012," published Saturday that outlines the state's business climate and offers policy recommendations.

"As the effects of the recession on West Virginia continue to fade, many challenges persist for the state, now and into the future," Sean O'Leary, policy analyst with the center and co-author of the report, said in a news release. "High unemployment, an aging and unhealthy workforce, and a changing economy all need to be addressed in order to secure future prosperity for the people of West Virginia."

While West Virginia has gained back most of the jobs it lost during the recession, the state's growing population has made the jobs gap even bigger, the report said.

According to the report, West Virginia's unemployment rate inched downward during 2011 and into 2012 after spending all of 2010 at more than 8 percent. As of July, the state's unemployment rate stood at 7.4 percent. Unemployment rates are even higher for younger workers, men, and African Americans, the report said.

Other findings show West Virginia's labor force is older, less educated and less diverse than the national average. According to the report, one in four workers in the state is 55 or older. And the labor force participation rate, the share of people 16 and older who are working or seeking work, is the lowest in the nation.

The report also said the typical worker in West Virginia makes more than \$1 per hour less than the national average and barely half of the workers in the state receive employer-provided health insurance.

Among other things, the center recommends expanding Medicaid, raise the minimum wage and create a plan for the anticipated decline of coal and set aside revenue from the natural gas production boom to protect the state's budget. Other recommendations include adopting a work-sharing program, restoring cuts to child care assistance to help low-income parents to work, and issuing bonds to create construction jobs to repair state infrastructure like roads and bridges.

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Online:

West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy: <http://www.wvpolicy.org>