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# Report: one-third of illegal immigrants have employer-based health care

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About one-third of working-age illegal immigrants in Virginia and Maryland have employer- based health insurance, according to a new report.

In Virginia, 35 percent of illegal immigrants are covered through their employer, and in Maryland, 31 percent are. Nationwide, about 31 percent of illegal immigrants, or 3.2 million, have insurance through their employers. About three-quarters of U.S.-born citizens in Maryland and Virginia are covered through their employers.

Manyimmigrants, including those in the country illegally, work for large companies such as meat-packing plants and hotel chains have full-time jobs with benefits, said Randy Capps, senior policy analyst at the Migration Policy Institute and co-author of the report "Immigrants and health care reform: What's really at stake?" The institute is a non-partisan think tank that studies the movement of people worldwide.

Capps said the majority ofimmigrants, though, both legal and illegal, work for smaller firms that may not provide benefits.

"The budget projections for health care reform assume substantial savings by excluding many immigrants, but do not factor in the costs associated with leaving so many people uninsured," he said. "Denying coverage does not eliminate the need for health care, and uninsured immigrants will head to emergency rooms or may postpone medical attention -- ultimately shifting costs to taxpayers and other health care consumers."

Still, while providing universal health care coverage is an ambitious goal, it would come with a price, said Michael Tanner, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank.

"The fact is you can't have universal coverage if you exclude legal and non-legal immigrants," he said. "The question is, who should bear that cost?"

Of the approximately 46 million uninsured people in the country, about 6.8 million, or 15 percent, are illegal immigrants, the report said. U.S.-born citizens comprised the vast majority of the uninsured, at about 33 million, or 71 percent.

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