



State's health care crisis grows

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The number of uninsured New Yorkers has skyrocketed by 550,000 since 2007, according to a new report that offers a glimpse into the state's postrecession struggles.

In addition, the report showed a 63% increase in the number of food-stamp recipients in New York City in the past four years, as well as a 2.2% drop in real median household income.

"This should be a wake-up call," said James Parrott, an economist with the Fiscal Policy Institute, which released the report. "The situation is pretty dire."

Almost 2.89 million people across the state are now without public or private health insurance, up from 2.34 million in 2007. The 23.5% increase was caused largely by a decline in insurance benefits provided by private employers.

"These numbers underscore the desperate situation that's out there," said Elisabeth Benjamin, vice president of health initiatives at the Community Service Society of New York. Benjamin and other health care advocates unsuccessfully urged state lawmakers this year to approve the creation of the health insurance exchange required under the federal health care reform law.

While the exchange would not take effect until 2014, advocates believe that approving it this year would have shown that lawmakers were serious about the state's growing health care problem. The Legislature is not expected to convene again in 2011.

"There isn't a popular movement to help folks get health insurance," an insider said. "It's not like housing. Or gay marriage."