

## **No coverage can be deadly**

By Brandon Larrabee

©Morris News Service 04/09/08

ATLANTA --- About 1,000 Georgians died in 2006 because they lacked health care, according to a new report from a Washington, D.C.-based organization.

The report, *Dying for Coverage in Georgia*, estimated that 19 uninsured people between the ages of 25 and 64 die in the state each week. It was issued by Families USA, a nonpartisan organization that lobbies for increasing health insurance coverage.

More than 6,000 uninsured Georgians died from 2000 to 2006, the group estimates.

The Georgia numbers were released as part of an announcement capping the release of 50 state-level reports, which Families USA said were the first attempts to figure out the numbers at a state level. Those reports drew on similar, nationwide studies by the Institute of Medicine at the National Academy of Sciences and the Urban Institute for their methodology.

"Our report highlights how our inadequate system of health coverage condemns a great number of people to an early death simply because they don't have the same access to health care as their insured neighbors," Ron Pollack, the group's executive director, said in a teleconference. "The conclusions are sadly clear: A lack of health coverage is a matter of life and death for many people."

Mr. Pollack said deaths caused by a lack of health care could include people who didn't get an early diagnosis or preventative treatment because they were worried about the cost. He said one woman went to the hospital to get treated for a heart attack, was forced to declare bankruptcy because of her medical bills and decided not to return to the emergency room when her symptoms reappeared.

The effects of not having health care coverage also touch those who might not be included in the numbers released Tuesday.

"They may not die, but it could have a significant impact on their lives," he said.

The report doesn't offer any new solutions to the problem of a lack of insurance, but Mr. Pollack said most of the help would probably have to come when a new president and Congress take office in January.

Georgia lawmakers worked to tackle the problem of the uninsured last week, passing a measure that would provide tax credits for individuals and companies who purchase health care plans with high deductibles and those who sell them.