

Jobless: Younger, not healthier

Written by Nicole C. Brambila The Desert Sun

Dec 02

mydesert.com

Daniel Lee looks a lot like the statistics.

“The desert doesn’t have the greatest job market, but it doesn’t have the largest pool of applicants either,” Lee said. “It’s a bit of a tradeoff.”

A new health report gives a demographic snapshot of who the unemployed in the valley are likely to be. And they look a lot like Daniel — young, single men with no health insurance.

The unemployed are also likely to have been earning less than \$25,000 a year and have earned a high school education or less.

The report used 2010 data from the Community Health Monitor by the Health Assessment Resource Center, or HARC. The Palm Desert nonprofit group was formed in 2007 to conduct health surveys that provide reliable data on more than 150 key health issues.

The report’s key findings show locally what experts have reported nationally, that health care coverage in the United States is closely tied to employment.

“It’s validation that the unemployed are uninsured,” said Eileen Packer, HARC CEO. “They don’t have access to health care coverage.”

More than 55,000 adults, or roughly 10 percent of the Coachella Valley population in 2010, were unemployed, according to the HARC estimates. Roughly 53 percent of those in 2010 lacked any type of healthcare coverage.

Other findings:

- 55.4 percent of the unemployed had earned a high school education or less; 22.4 percent had some college; 18 percent had a college education and 4.3 percent were post-graduates.
- 53 percent made less than \$25,000 a year; a third earned \$50,000 or less; and about 15 percent earned \$50,000 or more.
- Males were more likely than females to be unemployed in the Coachella Valley — 61.4 percent compared to 38.6 percent.
- Younger workers were more likely to be unemployed than older. About four in 10, or 41.4 percent, were ages 18-34; 34.3 percent ages 35-54; and 24.3 percent were 55 and up.
- 61.3 percent were single, divorced or widowed. Roughly 38.7 percent were married or cohabitating.

What health care professionals found particularly alarming was that two in five unemployed adults in the Coachella Valley had not seen a doctor in the past 12 months. And half of the unemployed hadn’t seen a dentist.

“This data makes clear that unemployed adults are less likely to have access to quality health care and preventative screening, making them an at-risk population,” the report concluded.

Unemployment figures since the recession have spiked in Riverside County, peaking at 14.7 percent in 2010, the year the survey was conducted.

Although the HARC study mirrors national findings, this was the first snapshot specific to the Coachella Valley.

“This is hard-hitting because it’s us right here at home,” said Dr. Glen Grayman, HARC’s board president. “It’s not an abstract. It’s real.”