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Local health report sees more drinking, less with health insurance

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The Desert Sun

The worst economic recession in modern memory hammered more than wallets. It also wrecked havoc on people's health care, a report released today has found.

From Calimesa to Blythe, we're more educated but earning less, binge drinking more, seeing the doctor less frequently, and more often out of work, according to a report comparing key health indicators from 2007 and 2010.

With more than 500 findings focused on access and service gaps, behavior risks and demographics, the "Community Health Monitor" is the only survey of its kind to look at a number of health issues in eastern Riverside County.

"This is the first chance for us to start looking at trends," said Dr. Eric Fykman, Riverside County's health officer.

The Health Assessment Resource Center, or HARC, conducted the first health survey in 2007, intending to update it every three years to provide reliable data for policymakers and nonprofit organizations.

The latest report offers a first glimpse into the toll the economic downturn has had on the health of residents in eastern Riverside County since the onset of the recession.

"I wasn't expecting much," said Dr. Glen Grayman, HARC's board president. "I thought three years just was not enough time to show any statistical change."

"Some things, quite frankly, are ugly."

In a nutshell, the report shows a hard-hit middle class with more being squeezed to the fringes.

Among the findings:

- * More than twice as many adults and seniors are out of work.
- * Greater numbers of whites were hit, their annual income plummeting to below \$25,000. But it was worse for women. A greater percentage saw their earnings drop below \$25,000, from 17.9 percent in 2007 to 27.6 percent in 2010.
- * About one in four adults admit to binge drinking – or consuming between four and six drinks at a time– roughly doubling in three years. And an estimated 13,500 people admitted to drunk driving.
- * Fewer adults saw a health care provider. Roughly two-third did in 2010 compared to three-quarters in 2007. And more adults didn't have any health care insurance at all, their ranks rising from 14.8 percent to 20.5 percent.
- * The number of adults needing help putting food on the table roughly doubled.

"It gets uglier if you break it down for certain groups," Grayman said. Latinos and the poor were hardest hit, he said.

Read more tomorrow in The Desert Sun.

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"Community Health Monitor" is the only survey of its kind to look at a number of health issues in eastern Riverside County.

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