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UTPA Health Services Research Initiative

Developing a New Research Program at UTPA to Address Health and Health Care Access Disparities, Particularly in the U.S.-Mexico Border Region

The Institute for Population Health Policy recently received a three-year, \$1.5 million grant (2007-2010) from the Agency for Health Care Research and Quality to develop a new UTPA Health Services Research Initiative. The research activities to be undertaken under this initiative primarily focus on health disparities and health care utilization/access for priority populations - more specifically, the uninsured and the low-income minority populations in the U.S.-Mexico border. The HSR Initiative also takes advantage of an ongoing collaborative partnership between the IPHP and the Leonard Davis Institute (LDI) of Health Economics at the University of Pennsylvania. The LDI will provide technical expertise, mentoring and support to the proposed HSR Initiative.

The initiative focuses on the development and support of four research projects dealing with community uninsurance and health care access, the cost-effectiveness and net-benefits of school-based health promotion programs, the use of health care services in the U.S.-Mexico border region, and severe weather and its relation to health care use by low-income and uninsured vulnerable populations. UTPA faculty members participating in this initiative are Drs. José A. Pagán, Cynthia J. Brown, Damian Damianov, and Daniel Sutter from the Department of Economics and Finance, College of Business Administration, and Drs. Dejun Su and

Chad Richardson from the Department of Sociology, College of Social and Behavioral Sciences. Project partners include David Asch (Executive Director of the Leonard Davis Institute and Robert D. Eilers Professor of Health Care Management and Economics at the Wharton School) and Shelton Brown (Assistant Professor of Health Economics, Austin's Dell Center for Advancement of Healthy Living, The University of Texas School of Public Health).

The four research projects are:

Community Uninsurance and the Quality and Access to Health Care in the U.S.

The objective of this research project is to analyze whether community-level uninsurance rates are related to individual health care access/quality outcomes for both insured and uninsured adults. The investigators also seek to identify the magnitude of these effects to be able to better inform health policy makers and public/private decision leaders about the economic and social costs of uninsurance. The central hypothesis of the proposed research is that the relative size of the local population without health insurance coverage has a negative financial impact on the local health care system and, ultimately, health care access and quality.



Lifetime Cost-effectiveness and Net-benefits of School-based Health Promotion Programs

This study will examine the effects of school-based health promotion on childhood obesity and nutritional intake in schools from an economic perspective. The primary hypothesis of the proposed project is that school-based health promotion interventions can lower child overweight prevalence and improve nutritional intake in a cost-effective manner. The objective is to analyze secondary data on the implementation of health promotion programs in Texas elementary schools, student-level diet and physical activity habits, and body mass index.

Explaining Cross-Border Utilization of Health Care: Evidence from the Lower Rio Grande Valley

This project will identify factors at both individual and contextual levels that can explain health care seeking in Mexico by residents on the U.S. side of the U.S.-Mexico border region. Specifically, it has two aims. One is to assess the role of individual-level predictors such as health insurance coverage, acculturation, social networks, and perception of the availability, accessibility, quality, and cost of healthcare services in the cross-border utilization of health care services. The other aim is to assess the role of community contextual factors in the likelihood of cross-border utilization of health care services by border residents, an issue that has not received enough attention from previous studies.

Extreme Weather, Health Insurance Coverage, and Health

This study will explore the links between weather, health, income, and the availability of health insurance. Extreme temperatures - heat waves and arctic conditions - have widely recognized health impacts, but the research will also examine severe weather. The objective of this research project is to better understand the impacts of weather on health and the impact of health insurance on reported weather related mortality and morbidity. A second objective is to examine how the availability of health insurance and medical care affect the health impacts of extreme weather. This portion of the research will examine extreme temperature events, tornadoes, floods, and possibly hurricanes. It is hypothesized that uninsured individuals are less likely to seek medical treatment for weather related illnesses or injuries.

To learn more about this new initiative visit us at www.utpa.edu/iphp or contact José A. Pagán at jpagan@utpa.edu.