

## **Texas will need 40,000 new doctors by 2025**

**By Travis E. Poling** - Express-News

As the population of Texas grows, led by an increase in the ranks of Hispanics, there will be a need for at least 40,000 new doctors by 2025.

About 20,000 of the 37,000 doctors now active in Texas will have retired or left their practice over the next 17 years, and another 20,000 will be needed to keep up with an expanded population, said Karl Eschbach, state demographer and director and of the Institute of Demographic and Socioeconomic Research.

Eschbach was speaking Thursday on health care and the economy to attendees of the San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce 3rd annual Healthcare Summit.

Even with that number of doctors, it won't be enough to address the disparities in access to health care in Texas border cities, where Hispanics make up the largest group of uninsured.

Recruiting doctors to Texas hasn't been hard in recent years because of the growing health care sector and laws that keep medical malpractice liability insurance premiums low.

But Eschbach said there will be more recruiting competition from other states as their physicians age and retire.

"We have to address the financing issue for paying for health care services," Eschbach said. "If they can make money here, they will come."

Under the current system, there are plenty of working people who don't have health insurance to give them easy access to a doctor. The issue is particularly dire among Hispanics in Texas.

Only about 66 percent of Hispanic workers are at companies that provide employer-sponsored health insurance, said Roland Angel, professor of sociology at the University of Texas at Austin. Among Anglo and African-American workers, more than 80 percent work for companies with health insurance.

The primary reason for that disparity is the fact that many Hispanics work for small businesses that are more worried about making a payroll than buying expensive insurance policies.

What's more, the rising unemployment rate across the country is shifting more of the health care expense burden to the public sector. With every 1 percent increase in the unemployment rate, states and the federal government incur an additional \$3.4 billion in costs, much of that related to health-care-poor families, Angel said.

"The situation is highly intractable, and it's going to get tough," Angel said. Even with the possibility of health care reform to cover more Americans, "it is going to be very hard to help many Mexican Americans because high-deductible plans are likely to be part of it."