

NEWS RELEASE

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NEW REPORT SHOWS NEGATIVE IMPACT ON HEALTH CARE COSTS AND BUSINESS IN ARKANSAS RESULTING FROM NON-USE OF SEAT BELTS

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (February 8, 2007) -- The Arkansas Center for Health Improvement released a new report today documenting higher hospital charges incurred by those hospitalized after a motor vehicle crash in which a seat belt was not used compared with those who used a safety restraint.

The report, which links Arkansas crash statistics, provided by the Arkansas State Police, with the hospital discharge data set of the Center for Health Statistics in the Arkansas Department of Health and Human Services Division of Health, shows that individuals not wearing a safety belt in motor vehicle crashes spent more days in the hospital and incurred much higher hospital charges than those who were safely restrained during the crash.

According to the report, the average individual hospital stay for those not restrained was 23 percent longer and individual hospital charges averaged nearly \$14,000 more than for those wearing a safety belt. Additional hospitalization expenses incurred by those not restrained in motor vehicle crashes add up to more than \$4 million a year.

Arkansas Center for Health Improvement executive director, Joseph W. Thompson, MD, MPH, said, "The higher hospital cost of not wearing a seat belt puts an unnecessary burden on individuals, private insurance companies, government-funded programs like Medicare and Medicaid, and on emergency health care facilities providing service to those who can't pay." Thompson added, "Between 2001 and 2005, additional charges resulting from individuals not using a safety belt were \$22 million more than if those involved had been buckled up. This is one of the factors that lead to higher insurance premiums and overall health care costs."

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Thompson also pointed out the negative impact non-seat belt use has on business, both in terms of lost productivity due to more days in the hospital and not at work, and inability to pay medical bills as one of the top causes of personal bankruptcy. He said, “The implications of an individual decision not to wear a seat belt have a wide-spread negative impact on families and businesses as well as on our health care system.”

The Arkansas Center for Health Improvement (ACHI) is a non-partisan, independent health policy center dedicated to improving the health of Arkansans. It is jointly sponsored by the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, the Arkansas Department of Health and Human Services, and Arkansas BlueCross BlueShield.

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