

The Associated Press State & Local Wire

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HEADLINE: Study reveals disturbing trends among city's poor

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BODY:

A survey of eight Baltimore health clinics and soup kitchens found 80 percent of those served had at least one chronic medical condition such as AIDS or hypertension, and 60 percent did not have health insurance.

Almost half have a mental health problem, according to the survey commissioned by the Open Society Institute, a New York-based foundation funded by billionaire financier George Soros.

"We're getting more and more booked up. There's so many people and so much need, and they just keep coming," said Dr. David Butcher, director of research and HIV medicine at Chase Brexton Health Services on Cathedral Street, one of the clinics surveyed. "I've noted myself the increasing complexity of each case. People are sicker." According to the new study, more than half the doctors surveyed said they were less confident about getting their patients necessary health care now than they were five years ago. Nearly 70 percent reported an increase in the number of uninsured patients seeking health care, and substantial difficulties getting specialized care and procedures for them.

"It's getting worse. We turn 30 to 40 people away a day," said Jeff Singer, chief executive officer of Health Care for the Homeless, where about three dozen people are lined up every morning before the clinic opens. "When people are living on the street, their health deteriorates."

Scattered across the city, the eight agencies studied are a sample of many that help the vulnerable and needy in Baltimore.

Services range from health clinics that provide support services, such as Health Care for the Homeless, to Paul's Place Outreach Center, which provides everything from hot lunches to teaching people to read. Together, the eight organizations surveyed serve about 21,800 people a year.

A quarter of the people surveyed earn about \$12,000 a year. About 60 percent were getting some government help, such as food stamps or disability payments, according to the study. Forty percent were homeless.

More than half the patients surveyed had difficulty getting medical care - especially dental care, prescription drugs and primary care - mostly because they had no health insurance.

"This is just yet another example of the tremendous consequences that lack of insurance has on everybody - not just patients, but taxpayers," said Dr.

Peter L. Beilenson, Baltimore's health commissioner.