Census shows another decline in median income

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Sun Sentinel

10:08 AM EDT, September 13, 2011

The U.S. median household income further declined 2.3 percent to $49,445 in 2010, a year after the Great Recession officially ended -- and the nation had higher numbers of the poor and uninsured, the U.S Census Bureau reported Tuesday.

Last year's real median income has dropped 7 percent from its peak in 1999, the new statistics showed.

The nation's official poverty rate was 15 percent, up a percent from a year earlier when the recession officially ended. That means almost 3 million more Americans were living in poverty in 2010, the Census Bureau reported. It was the fourth annual increase and the largest number of poor people in the 52 years the poverty estimates have been released.

The number of the uninsured also jumped from 49 million in 2009 to nearly 50 million last year, according to the Census Bureau. That meant 16 percent of Americans were without health insurance.

The Bureau released the latest data on income, poverty and health insurance coverage in the United States based on findings from the Current Population Survey.

Next week, it will release more detailed income and poverty estimate for states, counties and metropolitan areas with more than 65,000 people.

Other studies have shown that South Florida mirrors national trends -- while lagging during the recovery from the recession.

For example, the Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach area ranked in the bottom third for economic growth in 2010 among the nation's major metropolitan area, the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis reported Tuesday.

In the first quarter of this year, Floridians' personal income jumped 1.6 percent -- but still was lower than the national average of 1.8 percent, according to estimates from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

South Florida reflects how hard hit the state was by the recession, said William B. Stronge, a professor emeritus of economics at Florida Atlantic University.
"We're still on our knees," he said.

Indeed, unemployment in the state remains well above 10 percent -- two years after the nation officially emerged from the recession.

Locally, calls for help in general have leveled off but those pleading for assistance have become more desperate and even suicidal, said Diane Huff, director of community services at 211 Palm Beach and The Treasure Coast. That is the county's central hotline for referrals to social service and welfare agencies and groups.

"Suicide calls are up 50 percent," so far this year compared to the same period in previous years, Huff said.

One reason is that the recession is never ending for many in South Florida, she said. Many have been out of work for more than a year. They have exhausted any social services available to them, Huff said.

"They are extremely distressed and overwhelmed," she said. "They are saying, 'I can't go on like this.'"

Last year, the Census Bureau found that South Florida household incomes fell in 2009 to the lowest level in at least three years. Families with young children living in poverty skyrocketed in Palm Beach County in 2009 to nearly one in five, the report said.

Overall, South Floridians' median household income - half had more and half had less - plummeted by more than 10 percent in both Broward and Palm Beach counties between 2007 and 2009, the census found. That left South Floridians with a smaller median income than in 2006.

The figures, adjusted for inflation, showed in 2009 a far steeper decline in the standard of living in South Florida than the nation, where real median household income over the same two years fell only 4.1 percent.

Families without health insurance continued to grow in Florida in 2009 with the Sunshine State having a far larger percentage of the uninsured than the rest of the nation.