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**ABSTRACT**

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## Employers' health insurance cost burden, 1996-2005

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Data from the Employment Cost Index show that health insurance costs relative to payroll increased 34 percent between 1996 and 2005 and that the increase was largest for businesses paying low wages; simultaneously, data from the Employee Benefits Survey show that benefit packages became less generous, yet cost growth was not paralleled by a commensurate decrease in employer offers.

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