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\$217 million per hour on healthcare, but U.S. still falls short

July 23, 2008 | 6:01 pm

In testimony before the congressional [Joint Economic Committee](#) today, experts on education, economics and healthcare testified about how Americans are doing. Some -- very, very good. Others -- not so much.

But one group, the [American Human Development Project](#), an organization that looks at how Americans fare in the areas of health, education and income, for the first time put all three rankings together. They call the category "Human Development," and ranked the U.S. No. 12 among industrial nations in a report released this month.

"The indicators most frequently deployed in evaluating public welfare in the United States -- GDP, the Dow Jones and NASDAQ, consumer spending and the like -- only address one aspect of the American experience. The human development model addresses the broader everyday experience of ordinary people," the [report](#) says.

Despite the second-highest income in the world, despite being the the world's No. 1 economy, and despite spending \$5.2 billion a day on healthcare -- more than any other nation -- America landed behind 11 other countries in overall human development.

One of the main problems was that one in six Americans don't have health insurance. That limitation is connected to such factors as lower life expectancy and higher infant mortality. The U.S. also has the highest percentage of children living in poverty of the 30 richest countries. The top 20% of income earners in the U.S. make 15 times more than the bottom 20%. And 14% of Americans lack the literary skills to understand newspaper articles or navigate instruction manuals. Those measures -- education, poverty, poor health and shorter lifespan -- have all been shown to be interconnected.

"Human development is concerned with what I take to be the basic development idea: namely, advancing the richness of human life, rather than the richness of the economy in which human beings live, which is only a part of it," the Nobel laureate economist Amartya Sen, who developed the HDI in 1990, said in a [July 17 article in the Guardian](#).

It seems it's not just the economy, stupid, when it comes to human development. It's also health, education and income.

-- Susan Brink

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