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Idaho Health Care Experts Caution Consumers about New State-Based Plans

Boise, ID—In response to Blue Cross of Idaho’s recently released descriptions of new “state-based” health insurance plans that don’t meet many current consumer protections and benefit standards, Close the Gap Idaho, a statewide organization made up of health care stakeholders and advocates, warned consumers about the risks of purchasing one of these new plans and released a factsheet to assist Idahoans in making good insurance coverage decisions. Blue Cross of Idaho said it had submitted the new plans to the Idaho Department of Insurance following a recent executive order from Governor Otter that permits the sale of health plans in Idaho that are not compliant with federal law.

Under the new guidance insurers can charge higher prices to people with pre-existing conditions and impose an annual limit on the benefits they will pay out. In fact, Idahoans with pre-existing conditions who are older could face premiums that are much higher than other Idahoans.

“We want consumers to understand these plans cover less and could result in significantly higher out-of-pocket costs,” said Luke Cavener, Idaho Director of Government Relations for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network. “If you’re older and/or have a pre-existing condition, you could be charged up to 15 times more under these plans.” Cavener explained.

Not only can Idahoans expect higher premiums due to pre-existing conditions, the services they need may be denied. One of the main ways insurers are cutting costs for these plans is by denying coverage for pre-existing conditions for the first 12 months for many enrollees. People who have had gaps in health coverage will likely have to pay the full cost of

hospitalizations, emergency room visits, and other medical care that could be attributed to a pre-existing condition.

The new plans can also exclude certain health benefits such as habilitative services, pediatric vision and dental services, maternity care, and possibly even cancer screenings and charge people far higher deductibles and other out-of-pocket costs.

Advocates also raised concerns about the impact of these plans to Idaho's state exchange. Over 90,000 Idahoans receive coverage from the Your Health Idaho exchange.

"We're worried these new, less comprehensive plans will throw the health insurance marketplace out of balance, leaving Idaho families that purchase compliant, comprehensive plans paying higher prices," said Liz Woodruff, coordinator of Close the Gap Idaho. "Every Idahoan should take the time to look closely at these new insurance packages and think about how they might be impacted if they face an unexpected illness or accident."

Over fifteen national health care organizations have expressed alarm at the executive order. [A joint letter](#) to Secretary Azar of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reads, "Idaho's action—if it is permitted to stand—would seriously injure Idaho patients and consumers and significantly destabilize Idaho's entire health insurance market. Individuals and families who purchase these plans may not have insurance coverage for essential health services and would likely pay more out of pocket for the services that are covered—while older Americans and individuals with pre-existing conditions, because of premium surcharges, would likely pay more for less coverage."

In recent Boise State University public opinion polls, over 87% of Idahoans favored maintaining protections for people with pre-existing conditions and 69% opposed higher prices for people with pre-existing conditions.

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For more information:

Close the Gap Idaho:

[Close the Gap Consumer Protections Guide](#)

Web: <http://closethegapidaho.org/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Close-the-Gap-Idaho-383793818387609/?fref=ts>