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Oregon makes all health insurance rate filings public

Rules adopted today also implement improvements to rate review process

Salem, Oregon – The Department of Consumer and Business Services, Insurance Division, today finalized changes to its health insurance rate review process that make all information submitted as part of an insurance company’s rate request open to the public.

“Consumers now will be able to see everything their health insurer provides the state when they request a rate change,” said Teresa Miller, administrator of the Insurance Division. “We look forward to providing even more information to Oregonians about potential rate changes and receiving their input through a new public comment process.”

The Insurance Division must review health insurance rates for individual, small employer (2-50 employees), and portability plans before they take effect in Oregon. Portability plans are available to people who lose employer-sponsored coverage. As in many states, health insurance rates in Oregon have been rising by double digits, reflecting increases in medical spending. Experts expect that trend to continue in 2010, particularly for individual policies.

New rules adopted today put in place reforms passed by the 2009 Legislature. These include:

- A 30-day period for the public to comment on rate requests. Consumers can learn more at: <http://tinyurl.com/ORHealthRates>.
- More detail about what insurers spend on salaries, broker commissions, marketing and advertising, and other administrative expenses.
- Ability to consider an insurer's overall profitability rather than just costs for a particular type of insurance such as individual health plans.

All the changes are effective for rate requests filed on or after April 1. An advisory committee that included insurers, small businesses, and consumer groups worked with the division on the rules.

“Our department has been working for the past several years to make health insurance costs more transparent,” said Cory Streisinger, director of the Department of Consumer and Business Services. “Providing the public with information is key as we as a state and nation grapple with escalating health care costs.”

A law the department proposed in 2007 made health insurance rate review filings open to the public, and the new rules build on that effort to improve transparency. DCBS publishes an annual report called “Health Insurance in Oregon,” which provides financial and market data about Oregon’s major health insurance companies (available at <http://tinyurl.com/OrHealthIns2010>). Through other DCBS initiatives, Oregonians can now compare hospital costs, and find out their out-of-pocket costs for common medical procedures through an interactive Web site and toll-free phone number before getting treatment.

The Insurance Division, part of the Department of Consumer & Business Services, helps ensure the financial soundness of insurers, the fair treatment of consumers, and the affordability and availability of insurance products. For more information, visit www.insurance.oregon.gov.

The Department of Consumer and Business Services is Oregon's largest business regulatory and consumer protection agency. For more information, visit www.dcbs.oregon.gov.