



## What your vote means to the future of your healthcare insurance benefits

In the United States, affording health care has become a pressing national concern. Worries revolve not only around affording insurance premiums, but also about affording care even when insurance is in place. According to a 2016 Gallup survey, 27% of individuals in the United States identified affordability as the country's "most urgent health problem." So, it is not surprising as the mid-term elections draw near much of the focus locally and across the country has been on healthcare.

It is also no secret that the cost of healthcare continues to rise at a rate significantly higher than inflation. Cost increases have been well documented for both the private and public sector plans. Another nasty trend is that many covered under these plans have experienced negative pay and/or benefit increases. This has occurred when the required increase in contributions for insurance premiums was more than what was received as a pay increase or as an increase in benefits such as Social Security payments.

Particularly hard-hit are small business owners who are not eligible for a group coverage. Also hit hard are individuals under the age of 65 who are not eligible for employer sponsored plans. In Pennsylvania, on the exchange, a male in his early fifties purchasing a policy for himself would need to pay approximately \$1,200 a month for a plan that has a \$6,000 deductible. This means, each year, this person would have to pay out over \$20,000 before receiving any benefits. That's a lot of dough! I hear from these people regularly and they are desperate for access to high-quality, cost effective health insurance.

Our political parties do have very different approaches to fixing the problems with the healthcare system. The Democrat party views healthcare as a right and they are focused on preserving the provisions of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), more commonly known as Obamacare. Futuristically, they believe the best solution is to expand Medicare to cover all Americans and this will guarantee access to high quality, affordable care for all. There are two major concerns with this approach: first, many Americans do not want healthcare to be controlled by our federal government and second, such a plan has a huge price tag attached to it. The projected cost of \$32 trillion dollars is no small sum!

The Republican party wants all people to have access to healthcare insurance, but they wish to do so through private enterprise. They believe market conditions will fuel competition and with market reform coverage will become more affordable. Republicans are interested in returning oversight of healthcare to the states to allow the states to determine what makes the most sense for their citizens. Additionally, Republicans want to eliminate some of the requirements of the ACA believing this will drive down the cost of coverage. Some fear that these changes will limit people's ability to purchase insurance because of ongoing health issues or pre-existing conditions.

One significant feature of Obamacare was that insurance companies could no longer discriminate against someone with a pre-existing condition. A pre-existing condition is defined as one that existed before the insurance coverage was in place. Historically, insurance company policies included pre-

existing condition clauses in their contracts to prevent people from purchasing insurance only when they needed it. The downside to such clauses was they often created job lock since people with health conditions could not easily move from one job to another because of concerns about high out of pocket medical expenses for the period defined by the policies.

Much has been written over the last several weeks about our candidates for the House of Representatives and the Senate and their positions on healthcare policy. As is happening across the country, voters will need to decide the strategy they feel will best serve their needs and the needs of their fellow Americans. The challenge for all of us is that no matter which position we hold, fixing a system which represents 18% of our GDP will be a big challenge. That being said, if you want your voice to be heard, it is important to get out and vote!

Column by:  
Diane Hess, CLU CEBS  
Executive Director  
Central Penn Business Group on Health

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