

Covered California seeks Agent's Help

Over 20,000 paper applications need processing by deadline

SACRAMENTO, Calif., Dec. 5, 2013 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Covered California reached out to California Association of Health Underwriters today for help in entering information from thousands of paper applications previously submitted by Exchange certified agents. The online application process was discovered to have glitches when the Exchange originally opened for enrollment in October 1, 2013, so paper application forms were requested by Covered California as short term workaround. Since October, agents have filled out the 32-page paper form for thousands of new health care consumers and submitted them to Covered California by fax and U.S. mail.

Now, the data from applications need to be entered prior to the looming December 23rd statutory deadline and Covered California has turned to their certified agents for help in getting the application data entered into their online system. Only when the data is entered online through the exchange will health insurers be notified of the new enrollments and be able to provide them with a premium notice of payment due. Consumers must send their payments, postmarked no later than December 31, 2013, to their health insurers for their coverage to be effective as of January 1, 2014.

Agents throughout California are voicing serious concern that there may, literally, not be enough hours in the day between now and December 23 to have all that data entered in time to meet the December 23rd application deadline. "It currently takes over 90 minutes to enter the information from the application due to the slow Exchange system," said Bruce Benton of Genesis Financial & Insurance Services in Sherman Oaks, Calif. "To have to go back at this late date and key in the data from paper applications I have already submitted to Covered California is extremely challenging and will take several days to process. This is additional work on top of the Medicare open enrollment that is also happening right now along with the employer group plan renewals. I am working to midnight most every night right now just to keep up. This is a major issue."

Most licensed health insurance agents are small business owners and are deeply entrenched in their local communities throughout California, and take their responsibilities personally. "Agents are expressing the frustration that many small businesses face when working with the desire to provide excellent customer service and yet dealing with the very real stresses of overtime and increased payroll demands. For most licensed agents it is not an option to add to their overhead," said Sam Smith, President of California Association of Health Underwriters (CAHU). Smith has asked Covered California today to find a way to provide relief from the legally mandated application cut-off date by insurers for the thousands of individuals who submitted paper applications. "Good people expect to be fully insured, and CAHU's certified and licensed health insurance agents are fully committed to work with Covered California to resolve this crisis."

Patrick Burns, CEO of Burns Employee Benefits Insurance Services, LLC in Oakland, noted "The fax and mail application process was never intended to be the process - it was only a stop-gap fix which unfortunately did not work. So Covered California is moving to ask us to complete the process the way it was originally designed to be done."

Burns went on to note "This is going to push agents to the wall, but we are all in this together and we want to find the best possible solutions to work it through to best serve our clients. Our business and that of all other agents in California helps individual health care consumers, their families, and businesses seeking coverage for their workers, with the most affordable options for health care insurance."

There are more than 30,000 health insurance agents in California. To find a professional licensed and exchange certified Agent who is a member of California Association of Health Underwriters go to CAHU.org, click the Consumers link, and click the "Find an Agent" tab under the drop down menu.

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