

## Health insurance companies asking for higher rates in Idaho

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI, Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Health insurance companies are requesting rate increases on average as high as 25 percent more for plans in Idaho for 2016, citing increased medical costs and changes in utilization over the past year.

Blue Cross of Idaho Health Service has proposed the most rate hikes, averaging out to be nearly 24 percent higher than in 2015. However, some of the insurance company's plans include rate requests 27 to 31 percent higher for individual policies.

Last year, the company's average rate increase for individual policies was about 15 percent.

In total, the rate increases would affect 53,177 customers.

Meanwhile, Montana Health Cooperative — an insurance provider based in Montana that recently began offering plans for Idaho residents— is asking for a little more than a 25 percent rate increase for plans in the Gem State. SelectHealth has requested an average rate hike of nearly 15 percent.

Overall, companies found out that the claims paid had outpaced the premiums collected from customers in 2014.

For example, Regence BlueShield of Idaho collected on average \$281 from an individual premium, but paid an estimated \$320 in claims per member per month. SelectHealth Idaho saw an average of \$286 in premiums and paid out an average of \$508 in claims per month.

The proposed double-digit requests would apply to plans sold on Idaho's health insurance exchange created under President Barack Obama's health care law. The portion is smaller compared with people who get health insurance through their employers.

The Affordable Care Act has been in place since 2013, but providers —not only in Idaho but also across the nation— are only now getting a full year's worth of data on customer utilization and medical costs to fully weigh how much rates should be adjusted for next year.

"The idea is to get more people into the insurance pool," said Karen Early, spokeswoman for Montana Health Cooperative. "Idaho hasn't made a huge dent in getting more into the pool. If we have more people buying insurance who are on average healthy, we will be able to hold down costs."

The Idaho Department of Insurance is reviewing the requests to determine if they are reasonable. Only rates with increases of 10 percent or higher are submitted to be reviewed and need approval before they can be implemented.

Wes Trexler, a bureau chief with the agency, said that last year the department did not reject any of the providers' requests. No decisions have yet been made this year.

"It's always a little back-and-forth discussion between the department and the providers," Trexler said.

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