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National Health Insurance Industry Consumer Protection Proposals: Already In Place in Oregon

(Salem) – In recent weeks, national health insurance companies have made several widely publicized proposals to accept additional consumer protection standards as part of the discussion of national health reform. The Oregon Department of Consumer and Business Services, which regulates insurance in Oregon, confirmed that these consumer protection standards are already the law in Oregon.

The insurance industry's proposals involve individual health insurance plans, which are bought by those who do not receive insurance through their employers. In Oregon, consumers buying individual health insurance plans are protected in a number of ways:

- Individual insurance rates in Oregon cannot be based on the health of the person insured. A sick person does not pay any more than a healthy person of the same age. And rates cannot be increased just because the person insured has high claims. In many other states, those who have health conditions or have high claims have to pay much more than those who are healthy.
- Individual insurance rates in Oregon cannot be based on gender. In many other states, women pay higher rates because of the health risks associated with child-bearing.
- Individual health benefit plans in Oregon are “guaranteed renewable” – policies cannot be cancelled due to the health condition or claims of the person insured.
- Although individuals applying for insurance can be turned down due to poor health, anyone denied coverage in Oregon can get insurance through a state-run program, the Oregon Medical Insurance Pool (OMIP). You can find more information at: <http://www.omip.state.or.us/> Many states do not offer this option.

“We applaud the industry for coming forward with these proposals,” said Cory Streisinger, director of the Department of Consumer and Business Services. “These basic consumer protections work well in Oregon, and they should work well across the country.”

People with questions about insurance may call the Oregon Insurance Division's consumer advocates at 888-877-4894.

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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 afford ability 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.