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August 11, 2015

Gov. Shumlin Updates on Vermont Health Connect Backlog Progress

MONTPELIER – Gov. Peter Shumlin and officials at Vermont Health Connect (VHC) today announced that the change of circumstance functionality deployed at the end of May has allowed staff to reduce by more than half the backlog of customers waiting for changes to their health plans to be processed. The backlog currently stands below 4,500, down from over 10,200 at the end of May when the new functionality was deployed to allow VHC staff to process more quickly changes to customer accounts, such as a change in address, name, or income.

In addition to allowing VHC to make significant progress on reducing the backlog of change requests, the new functionality has allowed customer service staff to begin processing many incoming requests immediately over the phone with Vermonters. Prior to the deployment of the new functionality, this was not possible. Requests had to be logged and entered into as many as six different databases, a time-consuming process that added to the backlog even for relatively simple changes to customer accounts. Apart from changes processed as part of the backlog, VHC now completes nearly half of new service requests on the same day they are opened, often while the customer is on the phone. Those changes are then reflected on the customer's next bill.

"This change of circumstance functionality is working as it should," Gov. Shumlin said. "Not only are we making progress on reducing the backlog of Vermonters waiting for changes to be processed, we are able to better serve Vermonters who need to make adjustments to their accounts. Many Vermonters who call in with a request now see that change made immediately. This is how we intended Vermont Health Connect to function and it's encouraging to see the progress."

Independent reports are also confirming that the Vermont Health Connect customer experience has noticeably improved.

"Vermont Health Connect has made clear progress on the change of circumstance functionality that has long plagued its system," said Don George, president and CEO of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Vermont. "The State's optimism about the automated renewals is also welcome news. Blue Cross Blue Shield of Vermont looks forward to a fully functional system that can provide the customer-driven excellence its members have come to expect."

In March, the Governor and his health care team outlined a series of milestones to improve customer service for VHC. The first came at the end of May with the successful launch of the change of circumstance functionality. On August 1, the Administration also delivered to the legislature an operational contingency plan created with its insurance carriers and vendors to provide a smoother customer experience for open enrollment even if renewal functionality is not delivered as expected in October.

The next two milestones are slated for October 1, specifically:

- 1) Optum is expected to deliver the technology needed to enable a smooth renewal and enrollment process for 2016 health plans, which begins on November 1.
- 2) A new service standard will be set: Vermont Health Connect will be expected to process changes that customers report by the 15th day of a month in time to be reflected on the next invoice.

"As with any technology project of this size, it is impossible to predict the future," said Chief of Health Care Reform Lawrence Miller. "We are pleased that our dedicated customer service staff, who have helped tens of thousands of Vermonters sign up for quality health insurance despite technological challenges, finally have a working system. We remain cautiously optimistic that we will meet the remaining deadlines and deliver on the promise of Vermont Health Connect for Vermonters."