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Department of Vermont Health Access

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Vermont Health Connect Launches New Plan Comparison Tool

Available at VermontHealthConnect.gov, Tool Helps Vermonters Understand Total Costs

WILLISTON, VT – Vermont Health Connect announced a new resource today that will help Vermonters make more informed decisions when choosing the health plan that best fits their needs and budget. The Plan Comparison Tool allows customers to compare plans not just by monthly premiums and deductible amounts, but also by estimated total annual costs. Vermonters can try it out by clicking on the "Decision Tools" link at <http://VermontHealthConnect.gov>.

The Plan Comparison Tool estimates out-of-pocket costs based on age, health status, and expected use of medical services. Customers can consider the estimated costs of plans in a typical year, as well as in a high-use year, as they compare and shop for qualified health plans on Vermont Health Connect.

"We are working to ensure that Vermonters have the information they need to find the right health plan," said Steven Costantino, Commissioner of the Department of Vermont Health Access. "We have the Customer Support Center to help those who want to talk to someone on the phone. We have an Assister Program to help those who want to meet face-to-face with a trained professional in their community. And now we have a robust online tool for those who want to understand financial help and possible out-of-pockets costs from the comfort of their own living room or local library."

After the user answers a few short questions, the Plan Comparison Tool immediately displays two key pieces of information for each health plan:

- **An estimate of average total annual cost:** this single-dollar figure takes into account the monthly premium, any available financial help to lower costs, and an out-of-pocket estimate for someone with the same family size, ages, health status, and other characteristics as the user's household;
- **Risk in the plan:** the cost if the user's health care usage in a year turns out to be very high and the chances of having such a year.

These two pieces of information address what customers care most about, yet neither of these key facts has in the past been shown to shoppers on the federal Marketplace website or in most state-based marketplaces. With the Plan Comparison Tool, consumers can quickly see and sort essential information on all available plans within minutes—and they can drill down for much more extensive information if they wish.

The online tool was developed by the non-profit Consumers' Checkbook and has won the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's award for best plan choice tool.

This kind of resource is very important because "a consumer just can't figure out: is a plan with the \$200 deductible and a \$10,000 out-of-pocket limit better for me than a plan with a \$2,000 deductible and \$4,000 out-of-pocket limit—and how about differences in co-pays, co-insurance, etc.?" said Robert Krughoff, president of Consumers' Checkbook. "People don't know how much various health services

cost or their likelihood of needing different services – and even health insurance experts can be hard-pressed to figure out which plan is best without a helpful tool. Vermont Health Connect is a leader in making this help available.”

Vermont’s health insurers are among the organizations that are welcoming this new decision tool to the stable of resources that are available to customers.

“Blue Cross Blue Shield of Vermont is a longtime supporter of increasing health insurance literacy in the state,” said Cory Gustafson, Director of Government and Public Relations at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Vermont. “We are pleased that our customers will have this tool to help them choose the qualified health plan that best fits their needs.”

“At MVP Health Care we understand how complex health insurance benefits can be for most consumers,” said Jacqueline Marciniak, Associate Director of Public Relations at MVP Health Care. “We consistently work to help our members understand their benefits and utilize their plan in the most efficient way. Information is the key to understanding and we applaud the efforts of Vermont Health Connect on the launch of their Plan Comparison Tool.”

Vermont Health Connect’s 2016 Open Enrollment began November 1 and runs until January 31. New customers can sign up online, by phone, or in person with an Assister. Current customers are automatically being renewed into 2016 coverage; they can also call 855-899-9600 or click on the Renewals link in their VermontHealthConnect.gov account to report changes for the 2016 coverage year.

Tomorrow, December 15, is the last day to sign up or change plans for new coverage to start January 1, 2016. Customers who sign up between December 16 and January 15 will start February 1, and those who sign up between January 16 and January 31 will start March 1.

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