

Thousands likely to face sticker shock for health insurance

By LYNNE TERRY
Oregon Capital Chronicle

SALEM — More than 300,000 Oregonians who buy health insurance for themselves or through a small group plan are likely to see a spike in premiums next year.

The health insurance companies that offer plans on the individual marketplace and those that offer group plans are seeking average rate increases approaching 7%, according to the state Department of Consumer and Business Services, which regulates health insurers.

In the individual market, the requested rate increases for 2023 range from 2.3% to 12.6%, with a weighted average increase of 6.7%, the department said. That means a 40-year-old with a mid-range plan could pay as much as \$507 a month if the rates are approved.

In the small group market, the nine companies offering plans asked for increases from 0% to 11.6%, or as much as \$446 a month for premiums, the department said.

In comparison, the cost of plans in effect this year barely budged from 2021, going up by a weighted average of about 1.5% in the individual and group markets.

The insurers said inflation, a rise in medical costs and changes in enrollment necessitated the increases, according to the department. Health care costs in the United States, which spends a larger share of its gross domestic product on health care than any other industrialized country, rose nearly 5% in 2019, nearly 10% in 2020 and nearly 7% last year. The state is trying to curb increases and has a goal of a yearly rise up to 3.4%. That ceiling is in effect for Medicaid and state-paid health insurance plans, but it is not mandatory for commercial insurers.

The department has two months to review and

approve rates for 2023. The public will be able to comment online later this month about them.

The public comment period starts later this month and runs to July 7 online. There will be public hearings online on July 27 and 28. Go to oregonhealthrates.org for information.

Besides potential rate hikes, consumers will be hit with lower subsidies: Boosted subsidies from the federal government in place for 2021 and this year will end at the beginning of 2023. They have cut premiums by an average of 46%. That enabled people who earned between \$13,590 and \$27,180 a year to buy a low-end plan for \$1 a month.

The department said it could be worse. Without the state's reinsurance plan, which uses federal money to reduce premium costs, the rates would increase another 6%. Insurance Commissioner Andrew Stolfi said the program has kept premiums reasonable and given Oregonians choice.

"Oregon continues to have a strong and competitive insurance marketplace, with four carriers offering plans statewide and Oregonians in most (of) our counties having five or six companies to choose from," Stolfi said in a statement.

Stolfi encouraged consumers to comment on the plans and prices and participate in virtual hearings on July 27 and 28. During the hearings, each insurer will give a presentation about its rate requests, answer questions from the department and listen to the public.

"We look forward to a thorough public review of these filings as we work to establish next year's health insurance rates," Stolfi said.

The department will make a preliminary rate decision in early July, with a final decision in early August.

Wyden announces veterans-focused town halls

Chieftain staff

WASHINGTON — U.S. Sen Ron Wyden announced in a press release on Tuesday, May 31, the first of three online town halls for Eastern Oregon veterans, their families and veterans service providers to ask top Veterans Administration officials health care questions, including about the agency's proposals to reduce physical and mental health services in the region.

The first veterans-focused town hall meeting for Umatilla, Union, Wallowa, Baker and Morrow counties is scheduled for 10:30 a.m. on Saturday, June 4.

The town hall follows a letter the Democratic sena-

tor wrote earlier this month about VA recommendations that the Veterans Administration Medical Center in Walla Walla, Washington, be reclassified to a community-based outpatient clinic and to move its 31-bed residential rehabilitation treatment program 180 miles north to Spokane.

"The message I heard consistently at my recent town halls in Eastern Oregon made it clear that veterans have lacked a real opportunity to share their legitimate concerns about how these proposed changes will reduce access to both physical and mental health care," Wyden said in the release. "Veterans deserve topnotch care here at home thanks to their

service, and I'm committed to working with them and the VA through these veterans-only town halls to brainstorm solutions to secure that quality and accessible care."

The VA already has a community-based outpatient clinic in La Grande, which is frequently used by veterans in the rural region. The proposed changes to the Walla Walla center would make it similar to the La Grande clinic, and local veterans who need services beyond the outpatient clinic would have to travel to Spokane instead. Wyden has cited winter conditions, lack of public transit and weather-related highway closures as reasons for concern over the proposed limitations of

the Walla Walla clinic.

In a letter addressed to Dr. Teresa Boyd of the VA Northwest Health Network Office and Walla Walla VAMC Director Scott Kelter, Wyden wrote that he finds these changes "particularly troubling to my constituents in Oregon, who often trek across state lines to receive crucial care from the VA," he wrote. "Adding 180 miles to their commute will effectively cut off access to behavioral health and substance use treatment services."

Wyden, Kelter and Boyd will participate in the town hall. To link to submit questions is <https://bit.ly/3M28YIe>. The link to watch the June 4 meeting is <https://bit.ly/38RQMnb>.

FOR THE RECORD

MAY 23

12:07 a.m. — Report of suspicious person in Enterprise.

9:05 a.m. — Residential outlet fire reported in rural Enterprise.

9:23 a.m. — Theft reported in rural Troy. Another theft report taken by Wallowa County Sheriff's Office.

9:37 a.m. — Found white bulldog in Enterprise.

11:53 a.m. — Request for ambulance in rural Joseph. Search and Rescue activated.

12:19 p.m. — Report of threats in the city of Enterprise.

12:34 p.m. — Road hazard reported in rural Joseph.

12:36 p.m. — Information from rural Enterprise. Caller contacted and questions were answered.

12:49 p.m. — Follow-up investigation in Joseph; deputy spoke with family.

2:59 p.m. — Resident contact in Enterprise.

3:13 p.m. — Officer contact in city of Enterprise.

10:04 p.m. — Report of disturbance in Enterprise.

MAY 24

12:09 a.m. — Agency assist in Lostine. Enterprise Police Department assisting WCSO on a suspicious vehicle.

2:47 a.m. — After a report of a suspicious vehicle in Lostine, the WCSO arrested Jeremy K. Matte, 33, of Elgin, on a Union County failure-to-appear warrant and transported him to the Union County Jail.

1:29 p.m. — Civil dispute reported in Wallowa.

6:10 p.m. — Traffic complaint in rural Enterprise.

6:52 p.m. — Vehicle

parked in restricted area.

7:26 p.m. — Alarm sounding in Joseph.

9:32 p.m. — Vehicle impounded for no insurance.

MAY 25

12:01 p.m. — Noninjury traffic crash reported in Hells Canyon.

12:42 p.m. — James Michael Hansen, 70, of Joseph was issued a citation for reckless driving in rural Wallowa.

4:41 p.m. — Civil dispute in the city of Enterprise.

5:52 p.m. — Loose cattle in Joseph.

8:33 p.m. — Black Angus bull in the highway; referred to Oregon State Police.

10:09 p.m. — Report of suspicious vehicle in rural Joseph.

10:54 p.m. — Firearms complaint in Joseph.

MAY 26

1:54 a.m. — Report of two overdue motorists in rural Wallowa County (Imnaha area).

3:45 a.m. — Report of a motor vehicle accident in rural Enterprise.

7:48 a.m. — Dog as a public nuisance reported in Wallowa.

10:05 a.m. — Report of assault in Wallowa.

11:28 a.m. — Report of loose cattle in rural Enterprise.

12:54 p.m. — Public assist in rural Enterprise.

12:55 p.m. — Theft reported in rural Joseph.

1:29 p.m. — Shane Hood, 35 of Winlock, Washington, was arrested by the Union County Sheriff's Office on a Wallowa County Community Corrections Detainer for probation violation. Original charge of fourth-degree assault.

1:56 p.m. — Public assist in Joseph.

5:01 p.m. — Isaiah Nathaniel Wood, 21, of Elgin, was arrested by the WCSO on a misdemeanor charge of driving while suspended. Wood was cited and released.

5:41 p.m. — Theft complaint in Enterprise.

8:12 p.m. — Alarm sounding in Joseph.

8:26 p.m. — Theft reported in Enterprise.

10:06 p.m. — Traffic stop in Enterprise; warning.

10:18 p.m. — Traffic stop in Enterprise; warning.

10:40 p.m. — Colleen Higgins of Joseph was arrested by the EPD during a traffic stop in Joseph.

11:59 p.m. — Report of someone screaming in the street in Enterprise; unable to locate by police.

MAY 27

8:24 a.m. — Trespass reported in Wallowa.

8:43 a.m. — Found female Airedale terrier in rural Enterprise.

10:39 a.m. — Agency assist in rural Enterprise.

3:20 p.m. — Public assist in Enterprise.

8:19 p.m. — Report of a commercial security alarm in Enterprise; all clear.

8:51 p.m. — Vicki Riverman, 67, of Wallowa, was arrested by the WCSO after a report of a disturbance in Wallowa on charges of third- and fourth-degree assault and menacing. She was transported to the Umatilla County Jail.

11:35 p.m. — Traffic stop in rural Joseph; warning.

MAY 28

12:15 a.m. — Traffic stop in rural Wallowa; warning.

9:31 a.m. — Road hazard reported in rural Imnaha.

9:51 a.m. — Welfare check requested at Wallowa Lake.

11:16 a.m. — Harassment reported in Enterprise.

11:24 a.m. — Dead deer

reported in Joseph.

11:32 a.m. — Public assist in Joseph.

12:59 p.m. — Dog as a public nuisance complaint in Enterprise.

3:29 p.m. — Domestic reported in Wallowa.

4 p.m. — WCSO agency assist with Wallowa Valley Center for Wellness in Wallowa.

5:33 p.m. — At a traffic stop in Wallowa, WCSO issued a warning.

5:58 p.m. — At a traffic stop in rural Enterprise, EPD issued a warning.

8:22 p.m. — At a traffic stop in rural Lostine, WCSO issued a warning.

8:40 p.m. — At a traffic stop in Enterprise, EPD issued a warning.

8:46 p.m. — At a traffic stop in rural Wallowa, WCSO issued a warning.

8:51 p.m. — At a traffic stop in Enterprise, EPD issued a warning.

MAY 29

3:56 a.m. — Report of road hazard in rural Enterprise.

4:15 a.m. — Report of road hazard in rural Enterprise.

9:49 a.m. — Traffic complaint in Enterprise.

1:11 p.m. — Criminal mischief reported at Wallowa Lake.

3:14 p.m. — Traffic complaint in rural Wallowa.

4:34 p.m. — At a traffic stop in Lostine, WCSO issued a warning.

5:26 p.m. — Found dog near Red Hill Lookout. Reunited with owner.

8:38 p.m. — At a traffic stop in Enterprise, WCSO issued a warning.

8:51 p.m. — Theft reported in rural Lostine.

9:06 p.m. — At a traffic stop in Enterprise, EPD issued a warning for no lighting on a trailer.

9:45 p.m. — Agency assist in Enterprise.

WALLA COUNTY CHIEFTAIN

RILYN KIRKLAND

Rilyn Kirkland had a day to remember in her final home softball game on May 25. The senior standout for the Wallowa Valley softball team played a major role in the Outlaws' 9-7 victory over Dayton, going 4-for-4 with three home runs, a double, five runs scored and four RBIs. Her play helped the Outlaws to their first playoff win on the softball diamond in eight years.

Proudly Sponsored by

Ed's Ed Staub & Sons
Energy Community Service
201 E. Hwy 82, Enterprise • 541-426-0320
www.edstaub.com

FREE SHRED DAY!

Friday, June 3, 2022
10 am - 2 pm

Enterprise Community Bank
Back Parking Lot
Donations Benefit Soroptimist Projects

Clean out your filing cabinets!
Shred old tax records • Credit Card Statements
Personal Documents • Junk Mail

Sponsored by:
ACCREDITED SHRED SOROPTIMIST BEST FOR WOMEN COMMUNITY BANK MEMBER FDIC

AT&T internet

FEEL THE SPEED, EVEN AT PEAK TIMES.

Get strong, fast Wi-Fi to work and play throughout your home.*

No annual contract.

Power multiple devices at once—everyone can enjoy their own screen.

Over 99% reliability.

45% off

Contact your local DIRECTV dealer for more information. 888-486-0359

DIRECTV PREFERRED DEALER

YOUR HOMETOWN PAPER
at home and away!

Wallowa County **CHIEFTAIN**

JAC's Innovative Sales and Marketing Solutions
Contact Jennifer Cooney TODAY!
jacs.isms@gmail.com • 541-805-9630

KNAPP LAW OFFICE, P.C.

New Look! • New Location!

E: rjklaw@eoni.com • P: 541-426-7880 • F: 541-426-7882

Rebecca Knapp
ATTORNEY

PO Box 236
103 W Greenwood,
Enterprise, OR 97828
541-426-7880