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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

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April 14, 2016

Timothy Constantine
President
Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield Delaware
800 Delaware Avenue
Wilmington, DE 19801

Dear Mr. Constantine:



I write today to request information regarding the efforts of Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield Delaware (Highmark) to implement the Affordable Care Act's (ACA) requirement that certain health insurance plans provide tobacco cessation services at no out-of-pocket expense to enrolled individuals and families in Delaware.

With the passage of the ACA, millions of Americans have received help finding high-quality health insurance. Reforms enacted by the ACA require certain health insurance plans to provide more comprehensive coverage, including preventive health services without any cost-sharing requirements such as copayments, coinsurance, and deductibles.¹ This requirement has helped approximately 76 million Americans with private health insurance gain access to preventive services, including 225,000 residents in my home state of Delaware.²

Preventive healthcare services strengthen our health care system by keeping people as healthy as possible and preventing them from becoming ill in the first place. Each year, smoking-related illnesses cost our country over \$300 billion and are also responsible for approximately 500,000 deaths.³ Tobacco cessation programs are crucial as they educate our citizens about the dangers of tobacco use. Some studies have estimated that increasing the use of preventive services, including tobacco cessation screening, could reduce net annual health care spending in the United States by several billion dollars.⁴

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force), a group of experts who make evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services, sets

¹ Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 §§ 2713, 4104, 4106.

² *5 Years Later: How the Affordable Care Act is Working for Delaware*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Nov. 2015).

³ *Economic Facts about U.S. Tobacco Production and Use*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Dec. 11, 2015).

⁴ *National Prevention Strategy: America's Plan for Better Health and Wellness*, National Prevention Council (June 2011). See also Michael V. Maciosek, et. al., *Greater Use of Preventive Services in U.S. Health Care Could Save Lives at Little or No Cost*, Health Affairs (Sep. 2010).

requirements for which preventive services must be covered under the ACA, including blood pressure screening, immunization vaccines, breast cancer screenings, and tobacco cessation services. According to Task Force recommendations, clinicians should ask all adults about tobacco use, advise them to stop using tobacco, and offer additional counseling services or prescription drugs. Clinicians should also provide education or counseling to school-aged children and adolescents to prevent them from becoming tobacco users.⁵

The American Lung Association has studied the availability of tobacco cessation medications and initially found substantial variability by state and by company. Although comprehensive guidance has not yet been provided, the Departments of Labor, Treasury, and Health and Human Services have jointly prepared responses to frequently asked questions about tobacco cessation services.⁶ Subsequent reports have noted that all seven Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved tobacco cessation medications are available for Delaware enrollees.⁷ This coverage is commendable and demonstrates your commitment to helping enrollees obtain the resources needed for smoking cessation.

It is important to understand whether tobacco cessation services are available to individuals enrolled in your health insurance plans. Ensuring the ACA's requirements are implemented could help Delaware residents lead healthier lives and manage more effectively the chronic diseases that drive up our healthcare costs and reduce our quality of life.

To better understand Highmark's efforts to implement tobacco cessation services as required by the ACA in Delaware, please respond to the following questions:

1. Please describe how Highmark has implemented the ACA requirement that certain health insurance plans provide tobacco cessation services, including FDA-approved pharmaceutical drugs. Please provide a list of the tobacco cessation services currently offered under qualified plans and identify any changes as a result of the ACA.
2. How are enrollees informed of the availability of tobacco cessation services? Are these services identified in the plan's summary of benefits and coverage? Does your company promote preventive services beyond including a description in a plan's summary of benefits and coverage?
3. Does your company monitor utilization rates of tobacco cessation services for eligible enrollees? If so, please describe how many enrollees in eligible plans have used tobacco cessation services since the implementation of the ACA.

⁵ *USPSTF A and B Recommendations*, U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, current as of Feb. 2016.

⁶ FAQs about Affordable Care Act Implementation, Part XIX, Q5 (May 2, 2014).

⁷ *State Health Insurance Marketplace Plans: New Opportunities to Help Smokers Quit*, American Lung Association (Aug 2015 Update). *See also* *State Medicaid Program Coverage of Tobacco Dependence Treatments by Type of Coverage*, Kaiser Family Foundation.

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4. Does your company monitor health outcomes or net cost savings related to preventive health services such as tobacco cessation services? If so, please describe those outcomes or savings since the implementation of the ACA.
5. Are there any examples of health care innovation from Highmark since the ACA related to preventive health services, including tobacco cessation services?

Please respond to this letter by May 13, 2016. The Committee's minority staff is authorized to conduct this investigation under the authority of Senate Rule XXV and Senate Resolution 73 (114th Congress).

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

With best personal regards, I am

*P.S. Thanks very
much, Jim!
All the best!*

Sincerely yours,



Thomas R. Carper
Ranking Member

cc: The Honorable Ron Johnson
Chairman