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NEWS RELEASE

HMO Satisfaction Survey Ranks Utah's HMOs in Service and Care

(Salt Lake City, UT) – As of January 2001, 69 percent of Utahns received health care coverage through a Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) or another type of managed care organization. Today the Utah Department of Health's Health Data Committee and Division of Health Care Financing released the 2001 Utah Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) Performance Report on Consumer Satisfaction.

In spring of 2001, the Utah Department of Health surveyed 8,300 HMO enrollees who received their coverage through an employer or other non-governmental source (Commercial HMO enrollees) and those who received coverage from Utah's Medicaid Program (Medicaid HMO enrollees). The survey measured consumer satisfaction in several areas of care and service. Commercial HMOs participating in the survey were Altius, Cigna, Intermountain Health Care (IHC) Health Plans, Regence Blue Cross Blue Shield, UnitedHealthcare, and the University of Utah Health Network. (Not all of the health insurance administered by these companies is done under an HMO.) The Medicaid HMOs were Molina Health Care/American Family Care, Healthy U, IHC Access, and United MedChoice.

The results of HMO enrollee satisfaction surveys provide Utah's health care consumers with information about one of the most important factors to consider when choosing a health plan: quality. The survey reports have provided useful information to health service purchasers, health policy makers, individual consumers, and health plans. Overall, the report suggests that Utah's commercial HMOs might best focus on improving quality service, whereas Medicaid HMOs might want to focus on why their enrollees are not as satisfied with their doctors communication and helpfulness of the doctor's office staff as they are with their HMO's administration.

Utah's commercial HMO enrollees seem to be happier with their doctors and doctor's office staff than they are with their health plans' administration. The consumer report shows that the satisfaction levels of Utah's commercial HMO enrollees are higher than national averages in the areas of rating of doctor and courtesy and respectfulness of doctor's office staff. However, Utah commercial HMOs' enrollee satisfaction ratings are lower than national averages in HMO's customer service, rating of health care, and overall rating of HMO.

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Utah's Medicaid HMO enrollees reported higher than national average satisfaction with their health plans overall. For five out of eight measures, the level of satisfaction reported by Utah Medicaid HMO enrollees was significantly higher than national averages. Those areas are rating of HMO administration, getting needed care, rating of personal doctor, rating of health care, and getting care quickly. When comparing Utah's commercial HMO enrollees with their Medicaid counterparts, commercial HMO enrollees showed higher satisfaction with "how well doctors communicate" and courtesy and respectfulness of doctor's office staff than Medicaid enrollees. Medicaid HMO enrollees reported higher satisfaction than commercial enrollees in the areas of rating of health care, rating of HMO administration, getting care quickly, and HMO customer service. Overall, the level of satisfaction reported by Utah's commercial HMO enrollees is lower than national averages and that reported by Medicaid HMO enrollee counterparts.

The variation among six participating health plans was greatest for customer service for commercial HMO enrollee satisfaction. Specifically, some health plans were rated better by their enrollees in "getting needed help from customer services, finding or understanding written HMO information, and filling out forms" than were other health plans. There was also significant variation among the four Medicaid health plans in Utah in how enrollees rated whether their doctors' office staff treated them with courtesy and respect.

The survey questionnaire originated from the Consumer Assessment of Health Plans, which was developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. The 2001 survey was conducted by mail followed by telephone interviews for non-respondents. All of the above-reported findings are statistically significant at 95 percent confidence level. For a copy of the report and an abbreviated summary of the report (Health Status Update), which include graphics that depict the survey outcomes, visit <http://www.healthdata.state.ut.us>.

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