

New York State Association of REALTORS®

NAR 2015 Convention: Large State Leadership Idea Exchange

Survey of REALTOR® Health Insurance Coverage and Needs

Background: For many years, NYSAR members expressed concern about the overall lack of health insurance options for independent contractors as most carriers denied them coverage. In response, NYSAR entered into a partnership with an insurance broker and program administrator in 2008 to provide all REALTOR® members with access to comprehensive and affordable major medical health insurance. The partnership has expanded to include dental, vision, long-term care, life, auto and homeowners insurance options. The partnership are run through NYSAR's for-profit entity NYSAR Real Estate Services, Inc (RES).

Initially, the program experienced strong participation growth and quickly became NYSAR's most popular partnership. Implementation of the federal Affordable Health Care Act coincided with a precipitous drop in the plan's enrollment. Especially problematic was the severe limitation in our ability to offer open enrollment year-round and compete fairly against the federally subsidized program. As of October 1, 137 members participate in our health plan, 322 in the dental/vision plan, 10 in the long-term care plan, 14 in the life insurance plan and 18 in the auto/homeowners plan.

Our desire to better understand the overall state of health coverage for New York State's REALTORS® and identify opportunities to better meet their health care needs, RES commissioned a study in 2015 which was presented to the RES board in October. The study targeted members under the age of 65 who are not covered by their spouse's insurance plan.

Major Findings: The purpose for the NYSAR RES health insurance offering was to help fill an unmet need for our membership. There was no data collected at the onset of the program that would tell NYSAR how many members were without health insurance so we do not have a baseline by which to compare the study's findings. That being said, we feel that the study's finding that 91% of respondents currently have health insurance meets or exceeds any reasonable expectation we would have had at the program's onset.

From NYSAR's stand point, the main goal of members having access to health insurance seems to be met through a combination of private, government and association means. Although the RES role in reaching the 91% finding is slight compared to the other avenues in which our members obtain health insurance, we are pleased that even a small portion of our membership were able to find the best health insurance option through their NYSAR membership.

We were very encouraged by the study's finding that after hearing a description of the NYSAR Health Plan, more than half said they would be "very likely" or "reasonably likely" to consider it during the next open enrollment period. Growing overall awareness of the program's availability and educating members about its benefits is a priority for NYSAR going forward.

The RES program will continue and NYSAR will focus its near term efforts on targeting various segments of the membership with messaging specific to the area of the state they live in. interestingly, the survey data indicates that the majority of the uninsured are aware that they will face a tax penalty for not having any health insurance.