

Florida Blue: ACA enrollments “exceeded expectations” but premiums may rise in 2015

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Most of the consumers who bought a private health plan from Florida Blue through the Affordable Care Act’s insurance exchanges between October and April were previously uninsured — one of many factors potentially leading to higher premium rates in 2015, according to a senior executive.

Jason Altmire, a former Pennsylvania congressman and now senior vice president of public policy for Florida Blue, cited familiar reasons for a likely rise in rates next year, including the requirement that insurers no longer exclude those with pre-existing conditions, charge equal rates regardless of gender and charge older members no more than three times the amount paid by younger ones.

Other reasons consumers may see higher premiums in 2015, he said, include the Obama administration’s decision to allow Americans to keep their health insurance plans for an additional year even if the plans did not meet the coverage requirements of the health law.

Altmire said that most consumers signed up through the exchange were previously uninsured Americans who may have delayed seeking medical care, making them potentially more costly to insure.

“A lot of them aren’t in the best of health,” he said, noting that consumers who signed up at the outset of open enrollment were likely the ones who needed it most. “We expect it to cost more to insure them because of deferred health needs.”

Altmire said Florida Blue was encouraged by a post-February surge in sign ups among young adults, but that the insurer did not enroll as many of the so-called “young invincibles” as it had hoped, to help spread the risk across a wide pool — another factor potentially affecting premiums next year.

“It did not get to where we hoped it would be,” Altmire said of enrollment among young adults, though he declined to specify Florida Blue’s target.

Altmire also would not specify the total number of consumers who signed up with Florida Blue through the insurance exchange, or how many of them qualified for financial aid. But he said that enrollment “exceeded expectations” — with Florida Blue’s retail center in Hialeah signing up more new consumers than any of the company’s 19 stores in the state.

Altmire said “most” Florida Blue consumers who signed up for exchange plans have paid their first month’s premium, which is required to activate a plan. But he said many consumers remain

uneducated about the health law.

“A lot of folks,” he said, “thought it was going to be free.”

Last week, President Barack Obama announced that insurance enrollment through federal and state exchanges reached eight million people.

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