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HEALTHCARE REFORM & THE FUTURE OF THE *Small Business Owner*

Starting in 2016 on the Affordable Care Act (ACA) timeline was the expansion of the small group employer definition. The small group employer is now defined as companies with one to 100 employees. This market entails a vast number of America's entrepreneurs. It is the small

businesses that were the very fiber of our existence and provided competition within the workplace. Small employers are the backbone of America.

There are many options and flexibility in the marketplace. The business owner must search out options, make suitable choices and manage the benefits for what usually is a diverse workforce. There could be a broad spread in the needs and ability to pay premiums — from the least compensated to the highest compensated employees in many cases.

If the business owner accomplishes this task (or thinks that they have), then comes liability and compliance involving the management of the plan. This requires the expertise of a licensed, trained and certified independent agent. It is recommended that the HR person within your company work in partnership with an agent. This will allow for continuation of the other daily responsibilities.

If you are insured "direct" with a company, you are saving a small percentage of premium in lieu of the cost involved with a payroll employee. When you factor the true cost of the employee, including the benefits, and still to do not have the expertise of a qualified person, you are accepting a liability that could cost you your business. This is where an independent agent would serve you well through researching, managing and administering plans. It is a sound business decision to maximize your staff and resources, while reducing your liability.

Since the inception of the ACA in 2010, there have been mandates each year through 2018. In this year alone there are six mandates. Your planning over the last two years could make this year an easy transition. While the ACA has been a tough road for most of America, coming with extremely high premiums and renewal increases, contrary to what was promised, it can be better managed with a seasoned professional guiding you.

Health insurance questions remain too complex for most small employers and their workers to navigate and manage alone.

Brokers can open the door to a full spectrum of industry-wide programs and customer driven tools that cater to small businesses. The essential difference comes with the empowerment of enrollees and members to explore plan options, budget-planning tools, online

provider directories and prescription search tools. The personal support and guidance a qualified benefits manager makes is crucial.

If you're a small-business owner, you know how to provide your product or service. But when it comes to health insurance, it might be a very foreign concept. If you feel out of your element, brokers do this for a living.

We offer comprehensive benefit packages, including optional dental, vision and disability benefits. These plans can be customized for group, individual and key person needs. We also assist with the transition of your retirees. They are leaving your employment with an exit interview and a packet of very confusing and expensive materials. Sometimes they are ready for Medicare, which is another process that is a new venture for them. They are in need of expert counseling, guidance and service from an independent agent. Our customized support reaches far beyond the enrollment process with ongoing service as their needs and the health care environment continue to change.

Business owners and individuals need an independent agent to narrow choices via an analysis of needs and suitability within a budget. We work hand in hand with property casualty agents, CPAs, attorneys and financial planners. We all have a fiduciary responsibility to suggest professional counsel for your health insurance benefits. The ACA is a Federal law and penalties for non-compliance can be devastating.

Recommendations vary from business to business and from individual to individual. If you could use help navigating health insurance questions, please call us — we have over 40 years of experience and we can help. *

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