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GAO: Idahoans pay lowest rates for high-risk insurance

BOISE – According to a report from the U.S. Government Accountability Office, or GAO, Idahoans pay the lowest rates nationwide for high-risk pool plans. Idaho's risk pool has been in operation since 2001.

Department of Insurance Director Bill Deal said, "The success of Idaho's program is a result of having a stable source of funding and responsible supervision by a qualified board of directors."

Consumers insured by the high-risk pool are those whose health situations would normally cause them to be denied coverage. "Collaboration between the legislature and the insurance industry has created a product that is unique among high-risk pools. We are financially sound and benefits are priced competitively," said Hyatt Erstad, chairman of the high-risk pool board.

Currently, Idaho's approximately 1,500 policyholders are still paying 25 percent more than the standard rate — even with assistance from the high-risk pool.

The GAO reports the median state pool rate for a 50-year-old male non-smoker in 2008 was \$6,288 per year. The rate for Idaho's most commonly purchased plan was \$3,300 while the rate for Oklahoma's most popular plan was \$10,176.

Senator Dean Cameron, a member of the high risk pool board, would prefer the rates be lower but says, "Idaho's reform efforts and the appropriate use and management of the high risk pool have been instrumental in holding rates at this level."