

CHOICES COVERING 2% OF MONTANA

1% Previously Uninsured

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The Montana Chamber of Commerce, at a breakfast meeting in Billings this morning, recognized the 20,000th life covered by Montana Chamber Choices, its group health insurance program. That equates to more than 2% of Montana's almost one million population covered by the chamber program. The event was held in Billings and included two employees of Healthy Montana Kids First, one of whom became the 20,000th customer of Choices.

The milestone was made possible by the merger of two other plans into Montana Chamber Choices. Associated Merchandisers, Inc. (AMI) and the Montana Society of Certified Public Accountants joined forces with Choices this year to create a strong, stable insurance pool.

Webb Brown, Montana Chamber President/CEO, in making the announcement, said, "It is so appropriate that we hit this level during national Cover the Uninsured Week. Right at half of our customers were previously uninsured.

That means around 10,000, or 1% of the uninsured population of Montana is now covered because of Montana Chamber Choices."

Angie Lancaster, employee of Healthy Montana Kids (the 20,000th customer) said, "we figured if we were talking about getting kids covered in Montana, we'd better get coverage for ourselves, too."

Also speaking at the breakfast event sponsored by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Montana was Kristianne Wilson, VP of Strategic Development, Billings Clinic. During her comments, she noted that 60% of patients with diabetes skip some medications when they are uninsured. This only complicates treatment. She noted all the efforts they are undertaking to address this issue.

Maryann Reese, COO of St. Vincent Healthcare, was another speaker at the event. As the new operations officer, she noted hospitals are "reimbursed for sickness" rather than focusing on wellness. New initiatives underway will address that faulty logic.

Shelly Whirley of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Montana was the final speaker. "Blue Cross is proud to play a part in providing affordable health care coverage for so many Montanans."

Montana Chamber Choices is now the largest small business health insurance program in Montana. Eligible businesses range from the self-employed to businesses of 2-99 employees. Participants must be members of the Montana Chamber of Commerce or one of 47 local chambers of commerce that endorse the program. Choices is a fully-insured,

guaranteed-issue program, underwritten by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Montana. Associated Benefits of Montana manages this program for the Montana Chamber, along with their partners Mountain West Benefits and Mountain West Insurance.

Choices offers ten different insurance plans, ranging from full benefit plans to High Deductible Health Plans (HDHPs) and their accompanying Health Savings Accounts (HSAs). Every plan now includes a \$300 wellness benefit and a \$150 mammography benefit. The plans also qualify for the Insure Montana tax credit, incentive, and subsidy. Other qualifications, information, and details are at the program's website, www.chamberchoices.com.

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