

**Older Consumers' Knowledge of Health Insurance:
An Exploratory Study**

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Health insurance, whether obtained from a private insurance company or through a government program such as Medicare or Medicaid, is a complex consumer product. To attain satisfaction in the health insurance marketplace, consumers need to be knowledgeable about their insurance coverage. The purposes of the study reported here were to (1) measure insurance knowledge levels, experience, and attitudes, and (2) define topics and audiences for future insurance educational programs.

Health insurance consumers 65 and older living in an SMSA and a nonSMSA Nebraska county were the population for this exploratory study of 150 interviews. Individuals who participated were recruited while attending a service club or senior center event. One-way analysis of variance using the General Linear Model procedures of the Statistical Analysis System computer program was used for data analysis. Mean comparisons were performed using the Bonferroni t test. An alpha of .01 was established a priori to indicate significance.

Retired persons with greater general knowledge of health insurance tended to be male, 65-74 years of age, married, living with a relative, and with education beyond high school and/or annual incomes of \$30,000 or more. Age and education made no significant difference in knowledge of Medicare and supplemental insurance including long-term care insurance. In addition, marital status and income made no significant difference in knowledge of long-term care insurance.

On a scale of 1 (extremely negative) to 6 (extremely positive), the mean score for how those interviewed felt about health insurance coverage was $M = 4.700$. The mean scores for health insurance providers were: Medicare, $M = 4.097$; supplemental insurance, $M = 5.371$; and long term care insurance, $M = 4.476$.

When a spouse was identified as head of household, individuals had a significantly higher mean score ($M = 5.105$) reflecting their attitude towards health insurance in general than did those who identified themselves as head of household ($M = 4.523$). Overall attitudes about health insurance of individuals who live independently had a significantly lower mean score ($M = 4.569$) than

those that lived with a relative, including a spouse ($M = 4.870$).

Individuals with incomes of more than \$30,000 scored significantly higher ($M = 5.071$) than those with incomes of less than \$10,000 ($M = 4.578$). People with incomes of more than \$30,000 also had a more positive attitude about their health insurance providers ($M = 4.955$) than those with incomes under \$10,000 ($M = 4.473$).

Overall, the more satisfied individuals are with health insurance in general and/or with their supplemental insurance, the more satisfied they were with Medicare.

Consumer experience with health insurance appeals was reported to be minimal indicating the insurance appeals process as an area for future health insurance education. Study results also indicated other targeted educational efforts be directed to women, older retirees or their caregivers, single people, those with less education and/or income, and those who live alone.

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