



Crain's Health Pulse

Healthfirst joins HealthPass insurance exchange to serve small businesses

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Following its entry into the small-group market in January, Healthfirst said this week that its plans are now available through HealthPass, a private insurance exchange for small businesses.

Healthfirst will offer four plans on the exchange (bronze, silver, gold and platinum) to employers with 100 or fewer employees in New York City and Nassau County. Traditionally a Medicaid insurer, Healthfirst is targeting small businesses as part of its "reaching up" strategy to insure people with somewhat higher incomes, said Errol Pierre, vice president of Medicaid and commercial markets at Healthfirst.

"When we entered the Affordable Care Act marketplace in 2014, it was our first time handling members that had an income level above Medicaid eligibility," said Pierre. "We've done very well."

The insurer is second only to Fidelis Care in its share of enrollees in the state's Essential Plan, which serves low-income residents who earn up to 200% of the federal poverty level and don't qualify for Medicaid. It has also captured the second-largest share (15%) of the individual market among Qualified Health Plans on the state's ACA exchange, after Fidelis Care.

Working with small-business owners seemed like a natural next step for Healthfirst because it already serves many of their employees through the individual marketplace, said Pierre.

"In any given small business, there could be part-time employees who are better served getting coverage on the exchange, but there's also a class of employees who want the coverage from their employer," said Pierre. "We can be a one-stop shop."

HealthPass began discussions with Healthfirst about a partnership before the insurer even entered the small-group market, said [Vince Ashton](#), the company's president and chief executive.

"It's a less robust marketplace than it was 10 or 15 years ago, so it's nice to have some new choices and options," said [Ashton](#).

At the moment, the marketplace is in flux.

HealthPass is losing CareConnect, the Northwell Health-affiliated insurer that announced last month it would be shutting down. But the exchange also added Oscar to its roster Sept. 1 after the insurer entered the small-group market earlier this year.

"It doesn't help to have something like CareConnect happen, but unfortunately sometimes you have insurers coming in and out," said Ashton. "I hope the newest players are here to stay." —C.L.