**Communicating for America Calls on Obama Administration to Allow Consumers Opportunity to Use Obamacare Subsidies on Private Insurance Plans And Purchase Without Penalty**

*With mass departure of insurance carriers from marketplace, 19 percent of Americans will have only one insurance option in 2017, leaving many residents, particularly in rural counties, without choice or forced to pay tax penalty unless administration adjusts rules*

September 20, 2016, Fergus Falls, Minn. - Consumer advocacy group Communicating for America (CA) today called on the Obama administration to ease the restrictions on consumers purchasing Affordable Care Act plans in counties that will only have one health insurance carrier option in 2017. CA is asking the administration to temporarily allow residents in these counties the opportunity to use their tax subsidies on private insurance plans or forgive the tax penalty if they choose to purchase a non-qualifying health plan, such as [short term medical](https://www.pivothealth.com/short-term-health-insurance/?utm_source=press&utm_medium=release&utm_campaign=1county) insurance.

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, 19 percent of Americans eligible for an [Affordable Care Act](http://time.com/money/4470574/obamacare-providers-2017/) plan may have only one insurer to choose from in their county, with five entire states set to only offer one insurer in 2017. The number of [rural counties](http://www.vox.com/2016/8/31/12646348/insurers-quit-obamacare-rural-america) affected by the one carrier only option is expected to top near 31 percent. Pinal County in Arizona, which is located between Phoenix and Tucson, many have zero insurance carriers on the marketplace. In comparison, only 2 percent of counties had one insurance option in 2016.

“It’s time to sound the alarm,” said Jeff Smedsrud, Chief Executive Officer of CA. “The administration has been willing to change rules as the Affordable Care Act has evolved. This is the time for the administration and HHS to stand up for consumers the Affordable Care Act was designed to help. Evidence has proven that consumers benefit from choice. By temporarily giving residents in counties with just one plan option the ability to select a private insurance plan with their subsidy dollars or buy an alternative plan without penalty, particularly rural counties, the administration would help stabilize the marketplace for health care consumers.”

Analysis estimates there could be just two insurance options in 31% of U.S. counties, meaning about 60% of marketplace consumers will have two or fewer options when enrolling for an Obamacare plan in 2017.

“Rural counties are already underserved with limited health care options. As deductibles rise and insurance rates escalate, rural health care consumers are being forced into buying plans they don’t want or can’t afford,” said Smedsrud. “It’s time to provide temporary relief to help fill the gaps until the marketplace steadies.”

**About Communicating for America**

Communicating for America, Inc. (CA) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization with small business, self-employed and agricultural members across America. Since 1972 CA has been working on small business, tax, healthcare and agricultural policy issues on behalf of its members. For more information visit [www.communicatingforamerica.org](http://www.communicatingforamerica.org).