

American Heart Month Prompts Consideration of Added Protection

By John Doak, Oklahoma Insurance Commissioner

The American Heart Association and American Stroke Association designate February as American Heart Month, an ideal time to consider whether supplemental insurance to cover heart-related conditions is right for you.

Every year, more Americans die from cardiovascular diseases than from all cancers and accidents combined, and heart disease is the No. 1 killer of American women. The National Institutes of Health estimates that 1.1 million Americans suffer heart attacks each year, and the American Stroke Association says another 700,000 U.S. residents suffer a stroke, making strokes the third most common cause of death in the United States. Younger adults are not immune, as it was reported at the American Stroke Association's annual conference this month that the sharpest increase in stroke-sufferers (51 percent) was among males ages 15 to 34, a trend described as "definitely alarming" by researchers.

Your first priority is lowering the risk of cardiovascular disease by leading a healthier lifestyle. Beyond that, do you need to carry additional insurance against heart attack and stroke?

It is important to consider whether your primary health insurance is sufficient to meet your needs in the event of a heart attack or stroke. The high cost of treating these health crises can mean expensive deductibles, copayments and other financial responsibilities. One study of stroke victims over age 65 found that even six months later, three in 10 still needed help walking, about one in four patients required assistance with cooking or feeding themselves, and about one in four was admitted to a nursing home. So long-term recovery can be slow and you might miss time at work, adding to your costs.

A number of reputable companies sell supplemental insurance policies that cover specific critical illnesses, including heart attack and stroke. Supplemental insurance is a separate policy that adds to the health coverage you already have, providing additional cash benefits to help offset uncovered expenses and out-of-pocket health care costs.

If you decide it's worth considering supplemental insurance, contact your current health insurance provider or a licensed agent or broker in your community to explore the options. Be sure to purchase coverage only from reputable insurers. To check the licensing status of any agent or company doing business in Oklahoma, call our Consumer Assistance Division toll-free at (800) 522-0071, or visit the Oklahoma Insurance Department Web site at <http://www.ok.gov/oid>.

