

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### Virginia HMO Quality Usually Better than Nation and Still Improving

Richmond, Virginia; November 17, 2008—Virginia Health Information (VHI), a nonprofit health information company, is publishing HMO cost and quality reports at [www.vhi.org](http://www.vhi.org). Over a million Virginians are enrolled in HMOs. Many choose an HMO during their employer's *open enrollment* period between October and January. VHI provides Virginians HMO information to help them choose a plan based on costs and quality. The measurements include how often members get regular checkups including prenatal care, how effectively care is provided, member satisfaction and financial/administrative data.

Health Maintenance Organizations (HMOs) are managed care plans that stress regular member checkups, immunizations and early detection of illnesses with enhanced coverage for these services. HMOs traditionally have used "gatekeepers" a primary care physician participating in the plan to approve referrals to surgeons, dermatologists and other specialists. Some HMOs are removing some or all of the referral requirements. Virginia HMOs performed better than the nation on more than 80% of quality measures. Compared to Virginia's rates last year, statewide performance was higher in about 60% of all measures. "As a group, the quality of care provided to HMO members keeps getting better," said Michael Lundberg, VHI's Executive Director.

HMOs performed very consistently on many measures including:

- 91-96% of members got appropriate medications for their asthma
- 93-97% of adults 45-64 years old had preventive care visits
- 88-94% of members said their doctors always listened, explained things clearly, showed respect and spent enough time with them

For some measures, greater differences between HMOs were noted in members

- Highly rating their overall health care—from a low rate of 63% to a high of 82%
- Getting Care Quickly—HMOs varied from 75% to 90%
- Controlling high blood pressure—varied from 51 to 75%

Cost and financial information includes the average monthly premium for members and spending on medical care and administrative expenses:

- Statewide monthly premiums per member ranged from \$243 to almost \$320
- Individual HMO financial performance including profit/loss ratios varied widely from -13% to over 15%

Other measures fell short of what is possible:

- The rate of women receiving mammograms dropped for the fourth year in a row to 68%
- Colorectal cancer screening is improving but is still performed in just 60% of eligible adults
- 4 in 5 adults taking antidepressant medications for a new bout of depression didn't get the recommended number of primary care or mental health practitioner visits to see how well the medication worked

VHI's *HMO Finder* lists all commercial HMOs serving a city or county. *Compare HMOs* lets visitors compare all HMOs on almost 70 measures like mental health care, cardiovascular disease, or highly qualified physicians and premiums. *HMO Profile* lists all information for a particular HMO. Links to many HMO websites allow for rate quotes and plan descriptions.

Virginia Health Information is the nonprofit organization the Commonwealth of Virginia and businesses go to for consumer and business health information. VHI information also includes hospitals, physicians, nursing facilities and other health care providers. Visit [www.vhi.org](http://www.vhi.org) or call toll free 1-877 VHI-INFO.

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