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LISLE, Ill. — As millions of uninsured and underinsured consumers may wonder how to obtain affordable health insurance coverage in the changing health care system, family physicians nationwide are equipped with resources. Formerly known as exchanges, the new [health insurance marketplace](http://www.healthcare.gov) (www.healthcare.gov) provides a one-stop shop for consumers to research, compare, and purchase comprehensive health insurance plans. However, recent [research shows](http://kff.org) (kff.org) that many consumers – millions of patients throughout the country – are not aware that the marketplaces will be available soon, and thus they will undoubtedly have questions once they hear about them.

This lack of awareness prompted the American Academy of Family Physicians to publish new educational materials for both doctors and patients. The organization urges people who are looking for coverage to seek information from credible sources. Their family physicians, through their office staff, can help answer questions and direct them to useful resources.

Illinois family physician Ravi Grivois-Shah, MD of Chicago provides personal insight on the AAFP website, "The Medicaid expansion and new health insurance marketplace will help my patients find affordable coverage, enhancing their access to health care services. As a result, they will have better access to preventive health services, which not only will improve their quality of life, but also enable them to work, stay out of expensive emergency rooms, and stay healthier longer." You can [link to his full remarks](#).

"Increasing insurance coverage is vital to expanding access to care and improving overall health," said Reid Blackwelder, MD, who assumes the role of AAFP president Sept. 25. "The goal in the coming months is to get as many people covered as possible, which is why we are encouraging patients to turn to [FamilyDoctor.org](http://familydoctor.org) (familydoctor.org) and their primary care physician for guidance about finding coverage."

As the only medical specialty devoted solely to primary care for patients of all ages, and as the most-visited specialty in the country with 214 million office visits per year – nearly 74 million more than the next largest specialty – family physicians are truly on the front lines of health care reform.

At a time of such critical change and with millions of consumers entering the system, family physicians, their practices and office staff can be helpful resources for patients who want assistance understanding the new insurance marketplace, how it works, what's available, and how they might benefit.

According to a [recent Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking poll](https://www.kaiserhealthnews.org/capsules) (capsules.kaiserhealthnews.org), patients yearn to obtain information from trusted sources such as their primary care physician.

“Family physicians are perfectly positioned to discuss the importance of health care coverage and provide guidance regarding the new insurance marketplace,” said Blackwelder. “Most important we want patients to know we’re here to help. Part of adapting our practices is to ensure the right person is available to assist patients. We may not be able to answer all their questions, but we welcome an open dialogue, and we can certainly point them in the right direction.”

The AAFP has long supported [health care coverage for all](#). Coverage leads to better access to care, which leads to better individual health, which leads to better societal health and lower costs for everyone.

“Providing credible information to help patients make informed decisions about their health care is something family physicians do every day,” Blackwelder said. “But the new marketplace will inevitably spark different questions and conversations between physicians and patients.”

The AAFP’s [new resources for family physicians](#) and [new resources for their patients](#) (familydoctor.org) aim to help answer questions and provide guidance on the new insurance marketplace.

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Founded in 1947, the AAFP represents 110,600 physicians and medical students nationwide. It is the only medical society devoted solely to primary care. The Illinois chapter represents over 4,300 of those members.

Approximately one in four of all office visits are made to family physicians. That is nearly 214 million office visits each year — nearly 74 million more than the next largest medical specialty. Today, family physicians provide more care for America’s underserved and rural populations than any other medical specialty. Family medicine’s cornerstone is an ongoing, personal patient-physician relationship focused on integrated care.

To learn more about the specialty of family medicine, the AAFP’s positions on issues and clinical care, and for downloadable multi-media highlighting family medicine, visit www.aafp.org/media. For information about health care, health conditions and wellness, please visit the AAFP’s award-winning consumer website, www.FamilyDoctor.org (www.familydoctor.org).