

## Blue Cross unit's big score

Its Philadelphia PPO was ranked highest in a new survey from Consumer Reports.

### ONLINE EXTRA

Review surveys of HMOs and other managed-care plans via <http://go.philly.com/hmo>

By Josh Goldstein  
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Personal Choice, Independence Blue Cross' preferred provider organization, topped Consumer Reports' new national survey of member satisfaction with such health plans.

The survey, in the September 2005 issue of the magazine, ranks Blue Cross' Keystone Health Plan East lower among HMOs but above other HMO plans offered here by large, na-

tional competitors such as Aetna Inc.

Kaiser Permanente's HMO operating in Oregon and Washington state was the top-rated HMO plan in the survey.

The survey could be particularly important in the small group and individual segments of the market where the competition for subscribers, and potential profit, is greatest, said Micaela Brown, an analyst tracking the health-care market at HealthLeaders-InterStudy in Nashville.

"Individuals and small groups  
See **SURVEY** on C6

## Blue Cross PPO tops magazine's survey

**SURVEY** from C1  
are looking for value and service, so I think this type of survey makes a difference for that segment," Brown said.

She added, while Blue Cross is the dominant insurer and Aetna is a distant second, Philadelphia is viewed as a potentially lucrative market by large insurers such as UnitedHealth Group Inc., which is making a "huge" effort to gain business here.

Consumer Reports ranked 35 HMOs and 41 PPOs based on survey answers from about 35,000 readers between May 2003 and April 2004. They found all of the health plans in the report to be satisfactory.

The survey results showed

members' perceptions of their plans, but did not address cost and clinical quality, which also go into choosing a health plan, said Donato Vaccaro, Consumer Reports' research leader for the health plan survey.

Blue Cross executives said they were pleased that Personal Choice was chosen as the nation's top preferred provider organization. Blue Cross insures 3.5 million people, including 2.7 million in this area.

"Our top rating is important because, in this increasingly competitive market, it shows that we have high-quality products that satisfy our members," Joseph Frick, president and chief executive officer of Blue Cross, said in a statement. "It

challenges us to work even harder ... to provide our community affordable, quality health care."

Representatives from other health plans active in the Philadelphia region, including Cigna Corp. and Horizon Blue Cross and Blue Shield of New Jersey, said the report showed that members were generally satisfied. They said the Consumer Reports survey provided additional information to help them better understand subscribers.

"Surveys such as the Consumer Reports rankings can be useful, but consumers should keep in mind that it includes data from one year and is only a snapshot of what occurred dur-

ing a limited time," said Robert L. Dawson, president and chief executive of HealthAmerica, an insurer that is expanding its presence in Southeastern Pennsylvania from its base in other parts of the state.

Walt Cherniak, an Aetna spokesman, said the survey "is one tool that we can use to evaluate consumer perception of the care and service they are receiving in our plans."

In Pennsylvania and New Jersey, state agencies issue annual reports that measure the quality and performance of HMOs.

Contact staff writer Josh Goldstein at 215-854-4733 or [jgoldstein@phillynews.com](mailto:jgoldstein@phillynews.com).



Independence  
Blue Cross