

## **Small businesses find health insurance expensive**

[By Rick Longley/Staff writer](#)

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Small business owners in Glenn County participated in a health insurance survey conducted from November to January in six rural counties.

Glenn County Health Services Director Scott Gruendl presented the survey results May 19 to the Board of Supervisors. The survey was done in partnership with The Access Project and the California Endowment in rural counties including Glenn, Del Norte, Imperial, Mendocino, Shasta and Yolo.

In all, 254 business owners responded, he said, but their comments differed from what might have been expected.

Most small employers acquire insurance because they need it themselves, Gruendl said, and “they believe it is the right thing to do” to have it for their employees.

They do not take it to be competitive with other firms, he said. However, many do not have health insurance because their revenues are uncertain and the high premiums price them out.

Small employers want lower premiums, the survey said, and do not want to exclude benefits, increase cost sharing or limit access to providers.

But they also believe too much is spent on administration, pharmaceutical companies and profits, and there is not enough oversight of the insurance industry, Gruendl said. They suggested 85 percent of the premiums go to direct service and that service packages be simplified so beneficiaries understand the coverage. In addition, people who practice unhealthy behaviors should be charged for them rather than everybody else paying for it.

The rates should be more affordable to small companies, they said, instead of the group market rate going only to larger firms and corporate entities. Business owners fear individuals forced to buy health insurance out of the group market will buy the “bare bones” package and end up underinsured.

However, the smaller companies owners said nobody should be forced to buy health insurance even though they believe the health care system should provide coverage to everyone, Gruendl said.

Most of the respondents had less than five employees, Gruendl said. Those who participated received a \$10 gift certificate and one Glenn County employer got a \$100 gift certificate.

Local chambers of commerce and Rotary Clubs were asked to get the survey out to their members, he said.