

Sal Gentile, co-founder of Friday Health Plans, talks expansion into the Houston market

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A Colorado insurance carrier will join the roster of options for Houstonians shopping for health insurance on the Affordable Care Act exchange.

Friday Health Plans offers **six different insurance plans**, ranging from catastrophic coverage to the gold-level plan, which will be available to residents in Houston, San Antonio, Austin, Dallas, Lubbock and El Paso.

Sal Gentile, one of the carrier's co-founders, said the company hopes to scoop up consumers who are independent contractors and the uninsured. [Nearly one in five Texans](#) went without coverage in 2019, according to Census data, and insurers are hoping that Affordable Care Act exchange plans will appeal to those seeking health insurance during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Gentile spoke the Houston Chronicle to talk about what this means for Texans.

Q: Why expand Friday Health Plans to Houston?

A: We have a lot of options as to where we will go with our business in the future. Places like Houston present a wonderful opportunity, because compared to the national average, they have a higher proportion of demographics that fit our target market. Specifically, our target market is individuals and small groups who might otherwise buy as a family, and they look a lot like independent workers. We sell ACA-compliant health insurance, both on and off the exchange, as well as through brokers.

Q: What's different about your plans?

A: While the ACA requires every health plan to offer one free primary care visit, we offer unlimited primary care visits, including mental health visits that are at parity with primary care. We do so whether you visit your physician in-person or through our telemedicine partners. What we add to that is we have about 5,000 drugs in our formulary that are generic in nature and have no co-pay associated with them.

Q: Are the plans offered through your carrier cheaper than the others on the marketplace?

A: If you went on to the exchange on Nov. 1 and typed in your zip code, your age, your sex and if you're a non-smoker, what should pop up is a Friday Health Plan that is either the lowest cost or the second lowest cost in that market. We've filed and seen the rate comparisons to all the other filings, and we are confident that our prices will be the first or second lowest price in both the bronze and silver category, and among the cheapest in the gold category.

Q: What providers are on the list?

A: In Houston, we will have two systems that make up the majority of our facilities: The [HCA Houston Healthcare system](#) and the Texas Children's Hospital network. Between the two facilities, there are over 500 primary care physicians, over 2,000 specialists, another 12 urgent care clinics and nine ambulatory surgery centers.

It's important for us to build a network that is not only compliant but works for the members we're trying to attract. What you should know is our network is never static. We're always adding providers to it.

Q: How is Friday Health Plans funded?

A: Last year, we raised about \$52 million of capital from private equity. It's Peloton Equity out of Greenwich, Conn., and Leadenhall Capital Partners out of London, and then a smaller investor called the Colorado Impact Fund.

Then, there's an international insurer called AXA, and we do what's called a quota share with them. They basically share the risk that we underwrite in our markets.

Q: Why should people in Houston opt for Friday Health Plans coverage over a brand-name provider like Aetna or Cigna?

A: We know we meet all the federal standards. That should give everybody confidence that if they're buying it on the exchange, they're buying an ACA-compliant product that has been vetted by the government. Our pricing is going to give them better value than the other guys.