

Health plans push coverage options for Hispanics

Insurers are reaching out to the fastest-growing -- and least-insured -- ethnic group.

By [Emily Berry](#), *AMNews* staff. Oct. 15, 2007.

About one-third of Latinos have no health insurance, the highest rate of any ethnic group in the U.S. Meanwhile, the Latino population is growing by more than 3% annually, the highest rate of any ethnic group in the U.S.

For the nation's largest health plans, this equals growth opportunity. Health insurers say they are increasing their marketing efforts to sell individual plans to Latinos, and to encourage more participation in employer-offered plans.

The push comes as plans increase niche marketing to specific populations, particularly those who can afford insurance, but choose not to buy it. For example, WellPoint says it has had success selling its Tonik family of individual plans specially designed for single people in their 20s. In contrast, health plans' efforts with Latinos mostly involve selling current plans, not creating new ones.

Health plans say their efforts can play a big part in cutting down the number of uninsured in the U.S. But analysts say the plans have their own financial interests in mind as well.

Marketing to Latinos is an imperative for insurance companies

to grow, because the commercial business growth is limited, particularly as more smaller employers decide they can't afford health coverage as a benefit, said Sam Fleet, president and CEO of AmWINS Group Benefits at AmWINS Group Inc., a group benefits wholesaler.

"The real organic growth is the 47 million Americans that are uninsured," he said.

Latinos have the highest uninsured rate of any racial or ethnic group in the U.S., according to the Census Bureau. It says about 34% of Hispanics lack health insurance, compared with about 20% of African-Americans and 15% of white non-Hispanics. If current trends persist, the raw number of Latinos without insurance will rise quickly. The Latino population, now at about 14% of the U.S. total, is projected to reach 20% by 2030, the Census Bureau estimates.