

THE IMPACT OF SELECTED ISSUES RESULTING FROM COVID-19 ON AGENTS AND LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

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IMPORTANCE The COVID-19 pandemic has been extraordinarily disruptive for most everyone, but insurance agents are unique. Policyholder questions and needs are unprecedented, as some fall ill and others face job losses or sharp reductions in income. Agents must not only provide advice and support to their policyholders and process new contracts, but also must continue to adhere to regulations that are themselves evolving. Lessons learned from agent experiences during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic can help to ease transitions going forward and during future public health crises that may arise.

OBJECTIVES The objective of the study is to document the struggles of insurance agents and brokers during the COVID-19 pandemic through a series of interviews, to identify common issues, and to use these insights to develop a set of lessons learned.

EVIDENCE Interviews with leadership of state insurance agent and broker trade associations and national organizations such as the Independent Insurance Agents & Brokers of America (IIABA) and the National Insurance Producer Registry (NIPR), reveal substantial information on the problems and concerns that face insurance agents during the COVID-19 pandemic and offer a variety of perspectives and insights on common issues.

FINDINGS Key themes identified in interviews were a lack of clarity on and need for “essential employee” status for insurance agents; struggles adapting technology and operations to a new, largely remote pandemic environment; the need for a more seamless integration of regulations with efforts to support policyholders; problems licensing new agents and ensuring existing agents are able to obtain their required continuing education credits; and issues analyzing alternative, often mandated policyholder supports, such as premium reductions, cancellations, and rebates.

CONCLUSION & RELEVANCE The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the work lives of many people in many different ways, not the least of which are insurance agents. Much has been learned from the experience. Going forward in a COVID-19 world or in a future public health crisis, it will be important to have clarity around the definition of “essential business,” and given the significance of insurance during a public health crisis, to ensure that insurance agents and brokers are explicitly considered essential. Technology must be sufficient for agencies to maintain appropriate communications with and support for their policyholders and to facilitate internal reporting relationships. A more robust and flexible system for licensing and continuing education (CE) also will be important, as will a process for analyzing policyholder supports. Absorbing these lessons is critical for easing existing and yet-to-be seen transitions for agents and policyholders.
