

February 2013

INSURANCE *Tips*

## Free help with your insurance questions or complaints

Consumer Advocacy  
Hotline

Toll-free  
888-877-4894

Salem  
503-947-7984

Email  
cp.ins@state.or.us

Follow DCBS on  
Twitter



[twitter.com/OregonDCBS](https://twitter.com/OregonDCBS)

**Insurance Division**  
350 Winter St. NE  
P.O. Box 14480  
Salem, OR 97309-0405

Phone: 503-947-7980  
Fax: 503-378-4351  
Web: [insurance.oregon.gov](http://insurance.oregon.gov)



## Insurance agents, also called producers, do more than sell insurance. They can help you:



- Compare plans
- Explain terms
- Advise you on how much coverage to buy
- Tell you what is not covered or explain limits on coverage
- Fill out an insurance application
- File claims

## Finding an agent

✓ Check that the Oregon Insurance Division has licensed the agent. This can help you avoid people who pretend to be agents, take your premium money, and never buy the coverage. You can find this information at [www.insurance.oregon.gov](http://www.insurance.oregon.gov). Look for the search page. If you need help, insurance consumer advocates can look up a name for you: 888-877-4894 (toll-free). The advocates can also tell you about any disciplinary actions on an agent's record.

✓ Ask co-workers, friends, and family for recommendations. Referrals are a great way to narrow your list of potential agents. In meeting with an agent, bring a friend or trusted family member who might see something you overlook. You can also ask insurance agents for client references.

✓ Ask the agent what kind of service you can expect. Will he or she regularly evaluate your insurance needs? Help you make a claim? Explain how your policy works and your costs?

✓ Some agents hold professional credentials that require rigorous coursework and continuing education. However, some salespeople give themselves titles with similar-sounding names to imply they have expertise. For example, Chartered Life Underwriters (CLU) is a legitimate designation. But people selling life insurance and annuities to seniors – and who refer to themselves as “chartered” – may have no specialized training. An insurance consumer advocate can help you verify a valid credential with the issuing organization.



*Continued*

## INSURANCE *Tips . . . continued*

### **Types of agents**

- ✓ Independent agents can help you compare different companies. They receive a commission from the company you select. On the other hand, if you already know what insurance company you want, the company can recommend an agent.
- ✓ Find an agent who specializes in the type of insurance you want to buy. For example, if you are looking for health insurance, find an agent who works regularly in that area.

### **Watch out for ...**

- ✓ An agent who seems too focused on one product. Agents should be listening to your concerns and learning about your financial situation and needs.
- ✓ An agent using pressure tactics. Do not buy insurance to please anybody but yourself. Good agents should be happy to work with you and should not be concerned that you ask a lot of questions.

### **Agent pay**

- ✓ An insurance agent is often an independent business person rather than an employee of an insurance company. These agents typically receive a percentage of the premium (commission) every time you pay for insurance. Thus, agents generally want to provide good service so you stay with them.
- ✓ Ask an agent how he or she is paid. Some companies pay higher commissions than others. Make sure the agent considers your interests and is not favoring a company that pays higher premiums.
- ✓ Since commissions are based on premium, make sure you are not buying more insurance than you need or can afford.
- ✓ Some types of policies – whole life insurance versus term life insurance, for example – pay higher commission. Research key issues before you visit an agent so you can make informed decisions.

### **Working with an agent**

- ✓ Make sure the insurance needs of you and your family are fully met through detailed conversations with your agent. Track your conversations, including dates, times, and locations, as well as what was discussed.