

Knox-Keene license opens doors for San Diego employees who live or would prefer care in Tijuana SIMNSA, a Mexican HMO, is First Cross Border Health Plan to Obtain California License.

SIMNSA Health Care announced today that it has been approved by the California Department of Corporations to operate as a licensed HMO in the State of California under the Knox-Keene Health Care Service Plan Act of 1975.

SIMNSA (Sistemas Medicos Nacionales, S.A. de C.V.) is California's first licensed HMO authorized to contract with California employers to provide benefits and services in Mexico.

:We are proud to be the first Mexican HMO to satisfy California licensing requirements and we are looking forward to offering services to an expanded client base," said Frank Carrillo, president and chief executive officer of SIMNSA. "The approval is great news for San Diego employees and their dependents who either reside or prefer to receive healthcare in Tijuana , Mexico."

According to Neelam Sekhri, of Oakland, Calif.- based Healthcare Redesign International, in her book "Cross Border Health Insurance: An overview," more than 40,000 cross the border each day for work in San Diego. Assuming an average family size of 3.9 people, this represents 156,000 who would benefit from the SIMNSA product in San Diego alone.

"Another important benefit of the plan is the cost savings to subscribers. The SIMNSA HMO costs roughly half that of equivalent care through a U.S. health plan," said Mark Allen, vice president of the Robert F. Driver Company, a licensed broker of the SIMNSA health plan.

SIMNSA and several other Mexican plans have operated in California without a license for years since the Knox-Keene Act did not have provisions for licensing foreign health plans in California. As a result of public hearings held by the department of Corporations in San Diego and Senate Bill 1658, a provision was made for Mexican HMOs to obtain California licensure as of January 1, 1999. Four health plans submitted applications in late 1998 and early 1999.

Currently SIMNSA (www.simnsa.com) is the only plan approved by the State of California to contract with California employers to provide benefits and services in Mexico. SIMNSA provides care to approximately 10,000 members from more than 100 employer groups. Under the plan, routine services must be received in Mexico while emergency and urgent care services are covered anywhere in the world. SIMNSA has offices in San Diego and Tijuana and is sold through Robert F. Driver Company and other licensed brokers and agents in California.

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