HealthSource RI working to expand website search tools

EXCHANGE SPOKESWOMAN Dara Chadwick said that HealthSource RI is in the process of developing a search function that will enable consumers to easily view plans’ provider networks and covered prescription drugs.

In the coming months, users of HealthSource RI will be able to find out which providers are included in a particular health plan’s network directly through the exchange website. For now, consumers are directed to insurance companies’ websites to find out what doctors and hospitals plans include.

Exchange spokeswoman Dara Chadwick said that HealthSource RI is in the process of developing a search function that will enable consumers to easily view plans’ provider networks and covered prescription drugs. Chadwick said she did not know when this feature would be available.

The New York Times reports that most of the 14 state-run exchanges do not have provider directories or search tools on their websites – only Colorado, Kentucky, Nevada and Washington State currently do.

Health policy experts say that directing consumers to carriers’ websites may confusing and time-consuming, the Times reports. But Chadwick said that she is not aware that Health Source RI has received any complaints about the absence of the provider network and prescription drug search tool.

Angela Sherwin, program director of the Executive Master of Healthcare Leadership program at Brown University, who was deeply involved in the development of Rhode Island and Massachusetts’ state exchanges, said in a webinar last week that provider directories are among the additional “decision support tools” that consumers will likely see popping up on state exchange websites in the coming months. Quality data about plans, filter and search devices will help consumers narrow down their choices “in a meaningful way,” she said.

Sherwin said in an interview that the two pieces of information people are most likely to want to know before they buy a plan is whether their doctor is within the plan’s network and whether their prescription drugs are covered. That information is available now, she said, it just takes a “couple more clicks” to find it. Though incorporating this information into the Health Source RI website ought to be a high priority, she said, there were other “mission critical” functionalities that needed to be addressed first.