

The Availability of Insurance in the Maine Property & Casualty Market

Prepared by the Maine Bureau of Insurance
January 2021

Janet T. Mills
Governor

Anne L. Head
Commissioner

Eric A. Cioppa
Superintendent

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is prepared in accordance with 24-A M.R.S. § 2325 A(5), which requires the Superintendent of Insurance to report each year to the joint standing committee having jurisdiction over insurance as to whether there is, or may be, a lack of availability in any line of insurance.

Property and casualty coverages are generally available in Maine in the admitted market,¹ with a small percentage of coverage in surplus lines.² During 2020, the market for most lines of property and casualty insurance was relatively stable. Although insurance is generally available, some consumers continue to experience difficulty finding affordable coverage in certain property and casualty lines.

Overall, the personal automobile and homeowners markets in Maine continue to be quite competitive and among the most affordable in the nation. The greatest problem is affordability in the homeowners market for some consumers who have specific exposure issues or claims history.

Regarding commercial insurance, professional liability rates for physicians and surgeons decreased in 2014, which was the last rate change for that line. The last rate change for hospital liability occurred in 2013.

PERSONAL AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE

The personal auto insurance market in Maine continues to offer consumers low rates and a wide choice of insurers. Based on information received from the National Association of Insurance Commissioners, Maine maintained its position in the top states for the lowest premium in this line for 2016 and 2017, the most recent years for which data is available.³ Maine had the lowest average personal automobile insurance premiums in the country for 2017. This is an improvement over Maine's prior ranking of 3rd lowest average premiums for the six prior consecutive years (2011-2016). No other New England state is in the top ten.

Maine's personal automobile insurance market remains competitive, with the number of active companies and market distribution remaining steady. In 2019, the most recent year for which complete data is available, 109 insurance companies were actively writing this coverage. The top 10 companies wrote 56.53% of the market, and the leading carrier had a 11.66% market share.

Maine has the lowest percentage of uninsured drivers in the country at 4.5%, according to an October 2017 report from the Insurance Research Council, based on 2015 data. New York has the second lowest at 6.1% with Florida at the highest with 26.7% of its drivers estimated to be uninsured.

¹ Admitted insurance is sold by a company that has been licensed by the state in which the policy is purchased. The Bureau of Insurance authorizes admitted insurers to write specific lines of business, such as life, health, homeowners, liability, or workers' compensation.

² "Surplus lines" refers to specialized property or liability coverage provided by a non-admitted insurer in instances where, due to unacceptable risk, it is not available from insurers licensed by the state. The Bureau determines the eligibility of non-admitted insurers to write in the surplus market, subject to solvency requirements and satisfactory claims-handling practices. With limited exception, Maine law provides that property and casualty insurance coverage can be written in the surplus lines market only if an admitted market does not exist for the risk. See 24-A M.R.S. § 2004.

³ As of January, 2021, the NAIC has not released the 2018 data for personal auto.

Additionally, the Consumer Federation of America's February 2019 report, *Auto Insurance Regulation What Works 2019: How States Could Save Consumers \$60 Billion a Year*, identified Maine's auto insurance market as one of the best in the country. This in-depth national study examined the previous three decades of auto insurance regulation, analyzing the success of different regulatory approaches in holding down prices and encouraging competition. Its competitive scaling analysis determined Maine to be the most competitive market of all the states. This study showed Maine as having the 7th lowest change in average expenditure on auto insurance from 1989 to 2015 (despite Maine's mandatory minimum limits increasing from \$20,000 per person/\$40,000 per accident bodily injury and \$10,000 property damage, to \$50,000 per person/\$100,000 per accident bodily injury and \$25,000 property damage on July 1, 1998).

HOMEOWNERS INSURANCE

According to the NAIC, Maine had the 9th lowest average homeowners premiums for 2018, the most recent year for which data is available. Maine held the 10th lowest position for six consecutive years (2012-2017), and had been 11th lowest for 2011, 9th lowest for 2010, and 11th lowest for 2009. Maine has had the lowest average premiums in New England for several years.

For the first time in eight years insurers decreased base rates. The overall cost for this line showed an average 0.11% decrease in 2020. Although homeowners with certain risks may experience difficulty finding affordable coverage, overall Maine's homeowners rates remain among the most affordable in the country.

Maine's homeowners insurance market continues to be competitive, with the number of active companies and market distribution remaining steady. In 2019, the most recent year for which complete data is available, 105 insurance companies were actively writing this coverage. The top 10 companies wrote 50.86% of the market, and the leading carrier had a 12.12% market share.

Homeowners coverage is generally provided on either a replacement cost or an actual cash value basis. Many insurers continue to focus on efforts to assure that a property's coverage amount is 100% of its replacement cost. This coverage encourages policyholders to match their property coverage with the cost to rebuild their homes, and usually comes with an annual inflation adjustment. Replacement cost coverage allows for full replacement or rebuilding with similar kind and quality of materials, as long as the insurance-to-value requirements are met, without deduction for depreciation, up to the policy limit.

Actual cash value (ACV) coverage, defined by statute as replacement cost less physical depreciation, is another option available to policyholders.⁴ It can be a more affordable option for those whose homes⁵ would be costly to insure to full replacement value. The limits provided for personal property, detached garages, and out buildings are commonly written as a percentage of the limit on the dwelling itself.

⁴ 24-A M.R.S. §3004-A

⁵ Standard homeowners policies provide personal property (contents) coverage (for furniture, appliances, clothing, and other belongings) on an actual cash value basis, with replacement cost coverage available for an additional charge.

Insurers continue to take steps to reduce policy exposure to some types of loss, which can also reduce premiums. For example, some insurers offer separate deductible options for windstorm, water, and hail damages. Other insurers have amended deductibles from a flat amount, such as \$500 or \$1000 for each loss, to a percentage⁶ of the amount of insurance on the home for all losses, or for losses resulting from certain named perils, such as windstorm or water damage. While this type of deductible increases the policyholder's financial contribution if a loss occurs, it also lowers the premium. Relatively low deductibles of \$250 or \$500 are still available with some insurers, but for a higher premium.

Due to the increased frequency and severity of storms, the affordability of property insurance for coastal and island property remains problematic. Windstorm damage is a major concern for such properties, and new coastal property applicants have some difficulty finding coverage in the admitted market. In 2014, the Bureau held public hearings and developed a Rule pursuant to 24-A M.R.S. section 3061 to establish standards for the use of a Hurricane Deductible. This regulation, which took effect April 1, 2015, addresses this issue by allowing a higher deductible to apply for hurricanes, yet it also protects policyholders by limiting its applicability to the time period during which the location is actively under a hurricane warning from the National Weather Service and ending 24 hours after the last warning for that forecast area expires. The rule also requires notification to the policyholder when the policy is issued that a hurricane deductible applies to the coverage.

New applicants also continue to experience difficulty obtaining coverage for the following types of risks:

- Homes with prior claims;
- Older mobile homes or manufactured homes;
- Properties that are not well-maintained;
- Homes with businesses on the premises;
- Applicants with certain breeds of dogs or dogs with a bite history;
- Homes that are vacant or unoccupied; and
- Homes that have been uninsured for a period of time.

The surplus lines market has provided coverage for many of these types of exposures, but still accounts for just 0.79% of homeowners' written premiums for 2019, a slight decrease from .93% of the market in 2018.

MEDICAL LIABILITY (MEDICAL MALPRACTICE) INSURANCE

The medical malpractice market in Maine is highly concentrated, with 80.01% of the coverage provided by Medical Mutual of Maine. Medical Mutual's most recent rate filing was effective September 1, 2014, with a 3.2% decrease. The previous rate change was in 2011. Some physicians and many facilities, especially nursing homes, continue to depend upon the surplus lines market, paying higher premiums for less coverage. Surplus lines accounted for 9.1% of this market in 2019.

⁶ For example, a 1% deductible on a \$175,000 limit policy would result in a deductible of \$1,750 for each loss.

SURPLUS LINES MARKET

In 2019, the most recent year for which data is available, surplus lines premiums represented only 3.21% of the entire Maine insurance market.⁷ As of January 11th, 2021, 198 companies were eligible as surplus lines insurers.

Coverage in surplus lines is often more expensive, does not provide the same level of consumer protections,⁸ and covers fewer perils than insurance obtained in the admitted market. The surplus lines market does, however, serve an important function in Maine's insurance market by providing coverage that would otherwise not be available. In 2020, some commercial risks, including excess workers' compensation, property, liability, wet marine, and surety bonds found coverage in the surplus market.

⁷ 2019 surplus lines premium information includes a breakdown by foreign and domestic insurers only. State-specific premium data for alien insurers (i.e., insurance companies formed outside of the United States) is not tracked by the NAIC.

⁸ Admitted insurers are subject to form and, in most cases, rate regulation by the Bureau, and their claims payment obligations are backed by the Maine Insurance Guaranty Fund, which protects policyholders in the event of insolvency of an insurance company. Policies written through surplus lines do not have these protections.