

ARE YOU DOING YOUR PART?



A new campaign launched by the profession's eight trade associations helps protect families who are at financial risk

By Molly Olson

During the COVID-19 pandemic, one aspect of life that has come under intense scrutiny for many people is their insurance coverage. As reports about COVID-19 infections and deaths blazoned across the news, there was an almost immediate and natural reaction for people to pause and wonder: "Am I covered? Is my family protected?"

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This significant increase in awareness of and demand for life insurance protection is what made Dave Levenson, president and CEO for LIMRA, LOMA, and LL Global, dig deeper into why interest was spiking but sales levels were actually in decline. Levenson and his research team found that a quarter of U.S. households don't have insurance but need it — and another quarter have insurance but not enough of it. The fact that so many people lack insurance sparked the launch of the Help Protect Our Families campaign, the mission of which, Levenson explains, is to ensure that the financial security profession is proactively working with families to make sure they are appropriately protected in our current challenging environment and beyond.

This campaign matters to distribution, he continues, simply because more than 90% of all insurance sales are done with a financial security expert. “There are 330,000 professionals in our country,” Levenson says. “And we’re not going to appropriately protect those 48% of American households that need our help without engaging those 330,000 financial security professionals.”

Engaging for the Future

Getting so many financial security professionals on board, however, is no easy task. Levenson explains that this campaign spans the different trades within the profession and leverages the unique capabilities of each of the associations involved in the campaign.

“The ability to bring LL Global together with the American Council of Life Insurers [ACLI], Finseca, LIDMA, Life Happens, Million Dollar Round Table [MDRT], National Association of Insurance and Financial Advisors [NAIFA], and the National Association of Independent Life Brokerage Agencies [NAILBA] creates a much greater probability for success,” Levenson says.

“When we bring these different strengths together, it becomes a powerful combination to help us achieve our goals,” he adds. Each organization

brings its own strength to the table. For LL Global, that strength is research. ACLI brings its strength in advocacy, while Life Happens’ strength is in consumer messaging. Finseca, NAILBA, NAIFA, and MDRT bring a unique ability to connect and engage with some of the 330,000 financial security professionals.

LIDMA represents a small, but growing segment of the life insurance space, says Levenson, as those carriers and platforms interface directly with consumers without the assistance of a financial security professional. “We’re pleased to have representation from any association or organization that can help address the needs of the 60 million U.S. households that don’t have life insurance or don’t have enough life insurance,” he says.

Closing the gap on the uninsured and the underinsured is the main goal of the campaign. Success is achievable, and Levenson says basic metrics such as increases in policy sales and applications will obviously play a part. There are metrics that will be evaluated over longer time periods, as well. For example, when LIMRA conducts its next U.S. life insurance ownership study, it will determine how many households have any coverage and how many need more. This data will determine whether this campaign has made a meaningful dent in that 48% of households that had a coverage gap, which sparked Help Protect Our Families from the beginning.

The Practical and the Tactical

Trying to tackle both of these goals at the same time would be overwhelming, so Help Protect Our Families is broken into two phases. The first phase will focus on helping the profession engage with the 25 million households that are underinsured. “All we are asking is to engage our 330,000 financial security professionals and ask them to talk to their existing customers. Talk to them and review how their needs may have changed in the midst of the pandemic. That is a critical conversation to have,”

Finding the gold



When Justin Kerns started in financial security, he was given the simple task of talking with clients whose financial security professional had retired or moved to another organization, or perhaps even passed away, and doing the service work associated with those accounts

— tasks such as updating addresses or changing beneficiaries. Often referred to as “unassigned clients,” these policyholders weren’t new business, but Kerns, a financial security professional with Equitable Advisors and Community Financial Group in Virginia, notes that the work did present connections and a chance to review existing policies or recommend changes, which on occasion did turn into new business.

“To find gold, you’ve got to dig in the dirt,” Kerns is noted for saying, and as a new agent, unassigned clients had plenty of both. “I am all about client service, and it was a great opportunity to meet new people and help them review their accounts and plan for their future,” he says. In some cases, he notes, that meant driving 90 miles to do a review on their policies and nothing more. Other times, he adds, “It was just an update to their client profile or a beneficiary change, but either way it was a great opportunity to meet someone and let them know we are still here as a company and that they have someone to call if they have questions.”

The new work that his follow-up generated “was certainly enough to keep me in the business,” Kerns adds, “and there was enough there to keep me going to the next week, next month, next year as I built my own book of business.”

That simple act of reaching out and connecting has remained essential to Kerns’ business over the years — and it has become especially important in the wake of today’s pandemic, particularly with unassigned clients. As the industry adjusted to working remotely, it adapted and discovered new ways of doing business when face-to-face meetings simply weren’t possible. For example, Kerns and his team set up an email link for clients to schedule time with them via Zoom conference and, within the first week of this new process, had more than 40 appointments. Today, Kerns’ team continues to take a good number of appointments through online meeting platforms, and it is all part of a bigger strategy to ensure that both regular and unassigned clients know his team is still there and still working on their behalf.

“When clients have questions, they don’t feel like calling the service center,” Kerns says. “They’d much rather deal with somebody on a local level.”

Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed just how many clients were uninsured or underinsured, and for many professionals in financial security, it became an opportunity to close those gaps. Doing so, however, meant keeping the production wheels turning. For Kerns, that momentum was critical, and



slowdowns caused by social distancing could have turned into weeks of work for the team, waiting for clients to respond. Rather than let production slow, Kerns’ team leveraged My Marketing Station, a platform that allows professionals to reach a large group of clients and send preapproved documentation, schedule appointments, and hold virtual seminars to connect clients with subject matter experts on topics of interest.

“Even if clients are not involved in the seminar, they at least know we’re here, they at least know we care enough to invite them to these types of events, and that we make ourselves available,” Kerns says.

If there is one thing he advises, pandemic or not, it’s to never be too busy to service clients. Stay in touch, be available, and show how much interest you have in them. It’s not about closing business — clients need to know they are valued and that your interest as their financial security professional is sincere. For unassigned blocks, he says, “We want to live up to the promises that previous professionals made to them.” Whether meeting with a client in person, over the phone, or over the computer, the focus has to be on the relationship and rapport, rather than the products you sell. “Ask more questions than making statements,” Kerns says, “and you’ll become more than just somebody your client uses to update a beneficiary — you’ll become someone whose opinion they value.”


Levenson explains. Phase two will focus on how the profession can work together to protect the uninsured segment.

A kickoff presentation from McKinsey & Co. showing what the profession will look like over the next decade was shared with the collective membership in mid-March. Over the next several months, the campaign will feature messages from CEOs and distribution heads and will offer best-practice seminars for financial security professionals.

Forward for the Future

The Help Protect Our Families campaign is driving engagement and support from

the collective membership of the organizations involved, Levenson notes. While the campaign is gaining momentum, the country is also turning a corner on the pandemic, and Levenson doesn't want to see that momentum slip.

"I hope that all of the critical awareness we've developed over the last year doesn't dissipate," he says. "Because there will be other challenges that people have. And you buy life insurance not to protect against pandemics, but to protect from premature death and ensure that your family is protected. That need doesn't go away just because the pandemic is over." 

The importance of in-force policies



The need to provide new policies for people to suit updated life circumstances has long been both a challenge and an opportunity for the financial security profession. While only a portion of business for most organizations, the servicing of in-force policies still plays an important role. Ron Sussman, CEO of CPI Companies, sees that importance from two perspectives.

The first is as a priority for a professional to make a living in this space, as these are clients who already hold policies. "They have a reason to listen to you, and therefore, you have an opportunity to continue to service those people," he notes.

Secondly, he adds, continually looking at your block of business is essential. So, reviewing in-force policies annually can help improve your business and deepen your relationship with clients. "We provide our brokers with lists of their policies and ask them to contact clients to see if that client wants to take action," he says, adding that, in general, clients often don't get a lot of hand-holding after they've signed on for a policy. Yet talking with clients is an important way to both let them know other options are available and confirm that what they have is still suitable based on their current life circumstance. It's invaluable, Sussman says, to have those conversations as a way of fostering the relationship.

While it may seem simple to mine in-force blocks of policies, the reality is that they are not without their challenges. Sussman identifies three challenges that he sees as most common:

1) The process by which insurance companies uphold, manage, and maintain the policies is confusing and obtuse; 2) Products

promoted in the profession are often too complicated for people to accurately understand; and 3) The policy management and carrier-to-carrier exchange process needs to be more client friendly and expeditious.

"The answer for all of this is that the profession has to become more attentive to clients and what they're actually being sold," Sussman says. "One of the things I think is just fundamental in this business is that [a client's] need for insurance and the products that insurance companies provide changes pretty dramatically over time." A person in his mid-30s, for example, might have term insurance, which is fine for that time in life, but life will change. Thus, having an ongoing conversation and relationship with these policyholders is critical.

Financial security professionals have the chance to help clients change the policies they have and provide them with coverage that may better serve their current and future financial and personal circumstances. While there's not currently a way to make those changes simple for clients as they age and have new insurance needs, financial security professionals can step in, be a resource for clients, and help them through the process.

"There are people who need help," Sussman says. "There are people who need more coverage or need less coverage or need different coverage, and we should be servicing those people and not leaving them to deal directly with the insurance companies."

Like many aspects of the financial security profession, success comes down to the client relationships that professionals build and foster over time. In-force policies are no different — and should be a source of growth now and into the future.