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Get help navigating new Affordable Care Act rules at Thursday meeting

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BOUNTIFUL — Almost three years after it was signed into law in Washington, the Affordable Care Act is coming to Utah.

Starting in October, anyone can sign up for health insurance plans through federal exchanges and a marketplace that will act as a one-stop shop to connect individuals with multiple eligible plans.

People who don't have health insurance that is compliant with the law will have to sign up for such plans by the first of the year or face tax penalties.

The nonprofit organization Utah Health Policy Project is helping people do just that, and answering questions about the system known as Obamacare in public meetings around the state.

Its Education and Communication Director Jason Stevenson said his group is not an active campaigner for Obamacare, but it's the best solution that's surfaced in the last few years.

"This is what we've got, so this is what we're working with right now," he said.

Stevenson will speak at Bountiful City Hall at 7 p.m. on Thursday, Sept. 12, giving a presentation on what individuals need to do to comply with the new rules.

There are three big benefits people should be aware of, Stevenson said.

First is the marketplace, which he compared to having all the cereal boxes on one row in the store compared to having them scattered everywhere. It makes choosing easier, he said.

The second is the fact that people can't be excluded from insurance policies based on their health history under the new law. That will make healthcare less expensive for many people with major problems and will make it available to many people who have lived without insurance, including up to 400,000 individuals in Utah alone.

The third is tax credits that will help low-income people purchase the required insurance plans. People making up to \$44,000 a year may be eligible.

“The people who really need help are going to be able to get it,” Stevenson said.

To sign up for a plan, start by visiting the marketplace at healthcare.gov or calling the toll-free hotline at 1-800-318-2596. You will need your basic identifying information such as social security number and birthdate as well as tax returns and income projections for 2014.

Small business employers can start looking at their options on Utah’s health insurance marketplace, avenueh.com. They can also attend a free Friday morning seminar in the community classroom at Lakeview Hospital, 630 E. Medical Drive, starting at 8:30 a.m. Preregister by calling 801-299-5999.

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