

Utah enrollment in healthcare marketplace up in November

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SALT LAKE CITY -- Enrollment picked up in November among Utah residents for health insurance on an online federal marketplace that has been plagued by glitches.

About 1,800 people had signed up for plans in Utah by the end of November - up from just 350 at the end of October, the federal government announced Wednesday.

The increased pace of enrollment is mirrored around the country as the Dec. 23 deadline to have coverage approaches.

Nearly 365,000 had signed up by November nationwide - more than three times the October total. But it's still less than one-

third of the 1.2 million people officials had originally projected would enroll around the country by the end of November.

In addition to those who have already chosen their plans, thousands more in Utah are in the process of getting enrolled. The new federal figures show there are nearly 13,700 people who have completed their applications - more than double the 6,200 through October. Nationally, there are 1.8 million people in the pipeline.

Jason Stevenson, a spokesman for the Utah Health Policy Project, expects a substantial spike in enrollment numbers in December.

Just Tuesday there was an extended maintenance outage. Utah Rep. Jim Dunnigan, who owns a health insurance company, was trying to enroll a client during the outage and received an error message, telling the person to try again later. Dunnigan, a Republican who chairs the state's health reform task force, said about two in three people are getting through the system now.

"Things have improved," Dunnigan said. "They are not where they need to be."

Utah opted to have the federal government run the marketplace for individuals while the state continues to run its insurance marketplace for small businesses.

The insurance marketplaces are a key component of President Barack Obama's health care law, which requires almost all Americans to have health coverage starting next year.

But one major gap: very few young people are signing up. One Utah organization launched a social media ad campaign in hopes of encouraging a group known as the "young invincibles."

Take Care Utah has produced eight ads it is posting on Twitter and Facebook, including three that show people snowboarding, rock climbing and biking. The snowboard ad says, "The only thing riskier than catching big air in Utah? Not having health insurance."

The campaign was produced using \$1,000 in private funds from Association of Utah Community Health.

Stevenson said they want young people who may think it's better to just \$95 penalty on their taxes and not get health insurance to be realistic about the risk involved in that strategy.

"You can't sign up for Obamacare in the ambulance on the way to the hospital," Stevenson said.