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## Utah health data breach victims slow to protect themselves

Health IT • Only 15,000 of 280,000 victims are taking advantage of free credit monitoring.

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Victims of a cyber attack on Utah health records have been slow to protect themselves from fraud and identity theft.

As of Friday, only 15,000 of the 280,000 Utahns offered free credit monitoring had activated it — proof of the need for greater outreach, perhaps a team of on-call credit counselors, say consumer advocates.

Despite the state's efforts to remedy the breach and safeguard victims, people are frightened and confused, said Judi Hilman, executive director of the Utah Health Policy Project.

Some have questioned whether official state notices directing them to call a hot-line and enter their Social Security number are part of a scam. Those who call the hotline say operators read from a script and aren't able to answer questions.

"I need someone to help walk me through all this," said 80-year-old Eva Jackson, whose deceased husband was a victim of the breach. "I don't have a computer. They just tell me go to the library and type a letter to the Social Security Administration and ask them to deactivate my husband's number. But I live alone and have enough problems. Why should this fall to me?"

Hackers broke into a poorly protected Utah Department of Technology Services computer last month and stole Medicaid data.

But the breach wasn't limited to people on public health insurance. Many of the victims were privately insured or retirees on Medicare, including Jackson's husband, a career state employee.

Anyone who has been to the doctor in the past four to nine months is at risk.

The Utah Department of Health is hosting a community forum on Wednesday from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. to answer victims' questions and hear ideas from consumer advocates. It will be held at the agency's Salt Lake

City headquarters at 288 N. 1460 West.

“Our first priority as consumer advocates is to help the families repair the damage and protect their credit,” said Hilman.

Her group will also lobby for funding for an ad campaign to rebrand Medicaid.

Already, many people entitled to the low-income health insurance fail to enroll due to certain barriers and stigma, Hilman said. “We need to reassure eligible but not enrolled individuals and families that it is safe and important to apply for Medicaid and CHIP.”

Such a campaign is not included in the health department’s budget and would likely need a special appropriation by the Legislature.

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Help for victims

The Utah Health Policy Project is collecting signatures to petition the state for better counseling and outreach to data breach victims. To add your name, send an email to: [volunteer@healthpolicyproject.org](mailto:volunteer@healthpolicyproject.org). The letter will go to the Utah Department of Health and Technology Services, Attorney General’s Office, and Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah.

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