

# The Salt Lake Tribune

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## Fewer than 400 Utahns able to shop Obamacare exchange

Affordable Care Act • Secretary Sebelius pledges to have the Web portal working “for most users” by the end of the month.

BY KIRSTEN STEWART AND MATT CANHAM | THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE

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Roughly 106,000 Americans have been able to find coverage on the Affordable Care Act’s online health exchange — including 357 Utahns, the Obama administration revealed Wednesday.

Thousands more — 975,407 in the U.S. and 9,318 in Utah — have completed applications and received a determination about their eligibility for subsidies, but have not yet picked a plan.

An additional 396,261, including 4,816 in Utah, have been deemed eligible for Medicaid or the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

The figures are numerical proof of the technical problems faced by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in launching the Affordable Care Act marketplace.

Nearly 75 percent of those able to pick a health plan did so through state-run exchanges. Utah’s exchange for individuals and families is run by federal officials.

Even saying that 357 Utahns picked a plan through HealthCare.gov is a stretch, said Rep. Jason Chaffetz, R-Utah, who noted the administration is counting both those who paid for the first month of their insurance and those who didn’t.

He equated it to shopping online, saying that putting an item in your shopping cart doesn’t mean you bought it.

“The same is true of Obamacare. They can try to fudge and fake the numbers,” he said. “The reality is more people have lost their insurance to date than have been able to secure new insurance through Obamacare. That is the bottom line.”

U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius defended the numbers at a news conference on Wednesday, saying they are consistent with enrollment reported by Massachusetts, which built the nation’s first health exchange.

The first payment for exchange customers seeking coverage effective Jan. 1 isn’t due until Dec. 15, she noted.

Sebelius added, “We expect these numbers to rise” as officials continue to make fixes to the web portal and do outreach. The site will work by the end of the month for most users, she pledged.

The White House had predicted about 500,000 Americans would enroll in coverage the first month.

Congress is expected to take up legislation this week that would grandfather in some canceled plans that don’t meet the minimum requirements under the new law, an attempt to live up to President Barack Obama’s promise during the debate that people could keep their insurance if they like it.

The White House is expected to offer its own fix, but hasn’t done so yet.

In Utah, however, canceled plans haven’t been as much of a problem because state insurance regulators already permit grandfathering.

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Exchange questions?

The Utah Health Policy Project is holding several free consumer workshops about the exchange this Friday at noon at Salt Lake County’s technology labs. Consumers will be given information about the plan choices available and an estimate of the premium tax credits they may receive.

Central City, 615 South 200 East, Salt Lake City.

Copperview, 8446 South 300 West (Harrison Street), Midvale

Redwood, 3100 South Redwood Road, West Valley City.

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Utahns on the exchange

357: enrolled in coverage

9,318: completed applications

4,816: deemed eligible for Medicaid or CHIP

3,883: deemed eligible for subsidies

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