

# Nearly 85K Utahns sign up for insurance through Obamacare

By Lisa Riley Roche

Deseret News / KSL

May 2nd, 2014 @ 4:47pm

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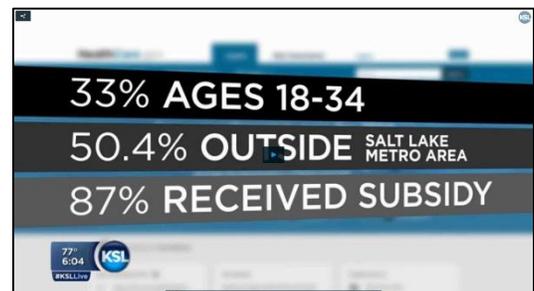
SALT LAKE CITY — Nearly 85,000 Utahns signed up for the health care insurance available through the Affordable Care Act, well above the enrollment goal of 57,000, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reported Thursday.

"I think people in Utah were open-minded and they really looked at the option," said Matt Slonaker, executive director of the Utah Health Policy Project, a nonprofit advocacy organization. "They saw it was to their benefit to buy insurance."



All but 13 percent of the Utahns who went on healthcare.gov to secure a policy before the March 31 deadline were eligible for subsidies under President Barack Obama's signature health care law, according to the report.

And one-third of the Utah enrollees were between 18 and 34 years old, compared to 28 percent of the 8 million people who signed up nationwide. Younger, healthier adults are necessary to offset the costs of covering older and sicker enrollees.



That's especially true in Utah, which has a younger population than the rest of the country, Slonaker said, predicting the split between young and old in the state would provide a good risk pool.

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But although the Utah enrollment numbers were better than expected, Slonaker said there's work to be done to take care of the state's nearly 400,000 uninsured residents.



Utah has yet to offer the Medicaid expansion available under the health care law best known as Obamacare. Gov. Gary Herbert has proposed a state-run version but it still needs approval from both Washington and the state Legislature.

The governor's Healthy Utah program would cover about 111,000 Utahns, including nearly 60,000 who do not qualify for subsidies without Medicaid expansion.

There was no agreement on Medicaid expansion during the 2014 Utah Legislature. Herbert has said he hopes to call a special legislative session by the end of the summer to approve his plan.

Slonaker said Utahns will be able to sign up for health insurance again starting Nov. 15 through Feb. 14, 2015. Those who marry, have children, lose a job or have other qualifying events can enroll at any time.

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