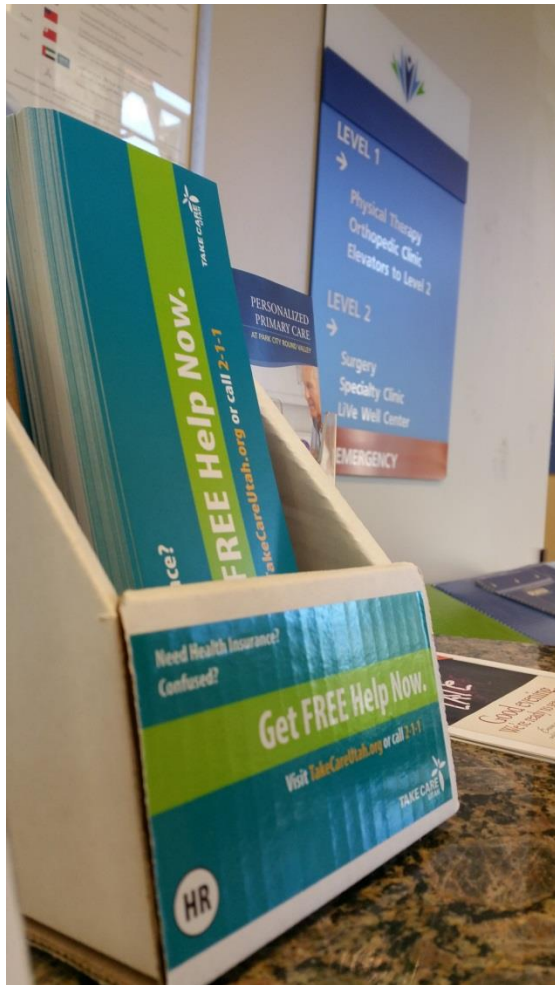


Deadline to sign up for health care law extended to Thursday

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Link: <http://www.sltrib.com/news/3317309-155/health-law-sign-up-deadline-extended-to>



Washington • The Obama administration says consumers will have two more days to sign up for HealthCare.gov coverage that takes effect Jan. 1.

Kevin Counihan, CEO of HealthCare.gov, made the announcement Tuesday night, citing "unprecedented" consumer demand.

The new deadline is Thursday at 11:59 PST. The original deadline for coverage effective at the start of the year had been midnight Tuesday PST.

In Utah, the extra time is especially helpful after Monday's snowstorm, said Jason Stevenson, education and communications director at the Utah Health Policy Project. His group's phone lines were down for much of Tuesday, when employees were rushing to help people enroll by midnight. The office already was crammed, Stevenson said, with people stopping in on lunch breaks or after retrieving their children from school.

Stevenson says Utahns should "window shop the plans" even if they are planning to renew their current package. "We find if people devote an hour or so, they've got a pretty good plan."

The federal healthcare site, HealthCare.gov, is much easier to use than it was two years ago when it crashed repeatedly, Stevenson noted.

"It's not as easy as shopping on Amazon.com," he said, "but it's getting better."

Those who would like free guidance doing so can call 800-318-2596, or 211 locally, and visit TakeCareUtah.org.

About 80,880 Utahns had signed up as of Dec. 12, according to the most recent federal data.

HealthCare.gov is the online portal to subsidized private health insurance in 38 states. Some states running their own websites, including New York and Minnesota, have also announced extensions.

The final deadline to sign up for 2016 coverage and avoid rising fines for being uninsured is Jan. 31.

President Barack Obama's health care law offers subsidized private insurance to people who don't have job-based coverage.