

More than 151,000 Utahns have signed up for federal health insurance

Link: <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865645150/More-than-151000-Utahns-have-signed-up-for-federal-health-insurance.html>

By Lisa Riley Roche, Deseret News

Friday, Jan. 8 2016 7:20 p.m. MST

SALT LAKE CITY — More than 151,000 Utahns already have signed up for insurance under President Barack Obama's health care law during the current enrollment period set to end Jan. 31.

"We're seeing unprecedented demand for marketplace coverage with more than 11.3 million people signed up nationwide," U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Sylvia Burwell said.



Thirty percent of the Utahns who went to the federal HealthCare.gov website to buy insurance were enrolling for the first time, according to a report Friday from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

"That is a really good number at this point," said Jason Stevenson, education and communications director for the Utah Healthy Policy Project that helps people enroll statewide. "We didn't think it would be that high."

Stevenson said new enrollees tend to be younger and healthier, the group insurers have been hoping to attract. Most of the people who signed on early for insurance under the Affordable Care Act, he said, had health issues.

More than 84,600 Utahns signed up when insurance under the Affordable Care Act was first offered through early 2014. That number increased to about 126,000 in late 2014 through February 2015.

Now, Stevenson said, the total enrollment for this period is likely to exceed 170,000. The numbers supplied by the federal government are through the holidays.

Although open enrollment for 2016 will close at the end of the month, those who want coverage to begin on Feb. 1 must sign up by Jan. 15. To avoid paying a federal penalty, a plan must be in place by March 1.

This year, steep fines will apply for anyone without coverage for 60 days. The penalty increases in 2016 to \$695 per adult and nearly \$350 per child, a maximum of just over \$2,000 for a family — or 2.5 percent of income if that's higher.

Nearly a quarter of the Utahns who have signed up are under 18 years old, compared with a national average of 9 percent, Stevenson said, thanks the state's larger family size

He said 86 percent of the Utahns who have signed up received federal subsidies. Subsidies are not available to anyone earning below the federal poverty level in Utah, however, because the state has not accepted Medicaid expansion.

More than half of those Utahns who re-enrolled switched their plans. About 35,000 Utahns had to find new insurance plans after Arches Health Plan shut down at the end of the year.

Utahns who want help applying for health insurance can go to www.takecareutah.org or dial 211. Information is also available at healthcare.gov.

Email: lisa@deseretnews.com

Twitter: DNewsPolitics