

Federal report: Affordable health care available to most Utahns next year

By ALEX STUCKEY |
The Salt Lake Tribune
First Published Aug 24 2016

Link: <http://www.sltrib.com/home/4274791-155/federal-report-affordable-health-care-available>

A recent federal report found that the vast majority of Utahns still will have access to affordable health care next year on the Affordable Care Act's online marketplace.

The report, released Wednesday by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, found that about 80 percent of Utahns who buy coverage on healthcare.gov could get a plan that costs less than \$75 per month next year — even if all marketplace health insurance premium rates experience a double-digit increase, officials say.

The Affordable Care Act created online insurance marketplaces that allow consumers to find the best plan to fit their needs by comparing prices and networks. They also can qualify for federal tax credits that help reduce the overall cost of coverage.

And these two reasons are why most individuals will continue to have affordable coverage in the coming year, department officials say.

Even if premium rates increase 25 percent in 2017, for example, the average monthly tax credits that individuals can access will rise as well, Katie Martin, the department's acting assistant secretary for planning and evaluation, said Wednesday.

"We know there has been speculation about rates in the marketplace," she said, "and we want to make sure everyone knows headline rate increases do not affect what consumers actually pay." Martin pointed to last year, when the average increase on healthcare.gov was \$4 per month with tax credits despite large projected increases in insurance premiums.

Jason Stevenson, Utah Health Policy Project's education and communications director, said Utahns enrolling on healthcare.gov similarly would be shielded from the intended rate increases from SelectHealth, University of Utah and Molina — increases of about 30.1 percent, 4.5 percent and 33.8 percent, respectively.

As of March, more than 164,000 Utahns had signed up for insurance through healthcare.gov, according to the project.

Utahns paid, on average, \$84 per person, per month in 2016, with an average subsidy amount of \$187, the project reported. Additionally, the project reported that 85 percent of Utahns who enrolled on healthcare.gov got some sort of subsidy in 2016.

astuckey@sltrib.com
Twitter @alexdstuckey