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Cydni Klauss

Big Changes to ACA Open Enrollment: Act Now for Health Coverage

BY CYDNI KLAUSS, HEALTHY, WEALTHY & WISE

Despite multiple efforts to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act, it looks like the individual insurance open enrollment for 2018 will continue as planned. But this year, the open enrollment period is just six weeks - significantly shorter than in past years. It's essential that those who need coverage sign up as early. Mark your calendars for November 1 to December 15, 2017.

If your health insurance is not provided by your employer and you need to buy health insurance for yourself and/or your family, it's important that you know when and how to get coverage, while keeping in mind the challenges that you could come up against while navigating the ever-changing environment of the Affordable Care Act.

November 1 to December 15, 2017 will most likely be your only opportunity to purchase individual health insurance. Don't leave it to the last minute - make this a November task, especially if you are enrolled through healthcare.gov. In previous years, healthcare.gov users have experienced long wait times on the healthcare.gov website, and likely will again this year. And while open enrollment has been extended by a few days in the past, you should not count on this extension for 2018 enrollment.

Things you need to know if you are...

- **Buying health insurance for the first time:** You can check to see if you are eligible for help paying your premiums using the tools available on healthcare.gov.
- **Enrolled for 2017 via healthcare.gov:** Log into your account and update your application. Do not start a new application as your 2017 information will have been rolled forward partially completing your 2018 application. If you don't update your account by December 15, you will be automatically enrolled in your current plan (or closest plan if yours has been discontinued) and you will not have an opportunity to enroll another plan until the 2019 open enrollment period.

- **Purchased 2017 health insurance directly from the insurance carrier:** Your coverage will normally continue from year to year unless you contact the insurance company. Your insurance company will let you know what, if anything, is needed to keep your coverage in place.

- **Enroll in a Silver level plan for 2018:** Premiums will be increased an additional 7.1% from the final rates published early this year on Silver level plans only. This increase is how the Oregon insurance regulators are dealing with an Executive Order signed by President Trump that stopped cost-sharing reduction reimbursements from the Federal government. Cost-sharing reduction payments help lower income insureds afford health insurance by reducing deductibles, maximum out-of-pocket expenses, and co-pays made at the doctor's office. Until recently when these payments were stopped, this was done through the insurance carriers who were then reimbursed by the federal government.

- **Need help paying your premiums:** You must enroll in your plan via healthcare.gov if you want to take advantage of the assistance available to help pay your premium. If you prefer to purchase your health insurance directly from the insurance carrier, you may do so but please be aware that you will not be able to claim tax credits on your Federal income tax filing, even if you are eligible for them based on income. All assistance with premiums and medical expenses are based on income. The higher your income, the less help you will get.

If you would like help navigating the changes this year, contact an agent. You can find a local agent on oregonhealthcare.gov or on healthcare.gov by using the locator tool.



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