

State health insurance marketplaces boost outreach efforts

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AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Educating the uninsured, especially young adults, is a priority, executives say.

(HealthDay)—Health insurance exchanges in five states with strong enrollment growth are ramping up efforts to reach even more uninsured Americans before the end of the Affordable Care Act's open enrollment period on March 31.

The March 31 deadline is for people who want [health](#) coverage for 2014.

Directors of health exchanges in California, Connecticut, Kentucky, New York and Washington spoke about their enrollment activities Wednesday during a news briefing sponsored by Families USA, a nonprofit health advocacy organization.

"I think it's fair to say all five of these are leader states. They have done an extraordinarily good job," said Ron Pollack, Families USA's executive director.

Not that there haven't been glitches along the way. Connecticut's health exchange, for example, has been working with Anthem Blue Cross and

Blue Shield to resolve problems with consumers who did not receive premium statements or ID cards, according to Kevin Counihan, [chief executive officer](#) of Access Health CT.

Exchange leaders said their main focus is expanding enrollment and educating consumers.

In all, 16 states and the District of Columbia run their own health exchanges where consumers may buy [private health coverage](#) or find out if they are eligible for Medicaid. Thirty-four states use the federal portal, HealthCare.gov.

Peter Lee, executive director of Covered California, said 498,000 Californians have selected a health plan and hundreds of thousands more have signed up for Medi-Cal. To drive additional enrollment, the state marketplace is bolstering efforts to reach young people and Latinos.

On Thursday, Covered California will be joined by several state-exchange partners and the Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit, Enroll America, in a six-hour live YouTube event called Tell a Friend—Get Covered. The event kicks off at noon Pacific time and will feature musical performances, skits and experts answering Twitter questions about the Affordable Care Act.

Visitors to the Tell a Friend website may click on their state to get more information or enroll in coverage.

Covered California also launched new ads this month in English and Spanish to help people understand how the exchanges make health care affordable, Lee said.

A lot of the marketing to Spanish-speaking consumers will be focused on channeling them to local, in-person enrollment assistance, he said.

In Washington, about 20 percent of the health plan enrollees are in the key 18-to-34 age bracket, a slightly lower proportion than the national average of 24 percent, said Richard Onizuka, chief executive officer of Washington Health Benefit Exchange, an independent organization created to implement the Affordable Care Act in the state.

Washington's online health marketplace, which goes by the name Washington Healthplanfinder, on Wednesday announced a partnership with concert promoter Live Nation to reach the young adult population. Outreach will be tied to the Sasquatch! Music Festival and select Live Nation concerts across the state.

In Connecticut, the focus is on "just as much enrollment as possible," said Counihan, who expects young people to be among the latecomers to the insurance exchanges.

"I think we're all going to experience more [young people](#) enrolling at the end of March than we are in January or February," he said.

Access Health CT is introducing a new enrollment application for tablets and smartphones beginning in March. An avatar will be added to the application during the summer to improve the enrollment experience.

Kentucky's health benefit exchange hopes to "maintain the intensity of enrollment," said Carrie Banahan, executive director of the Office of the Kentucky Benefit Exchange, where 2,000 to 3,000 consumers are signing up each day.

A significant percentage of consumers are not aware that they may be eligible for financial assistance or expanded Medicaid coverage, Families USA's Pollack noted.

"As long as that remains an information gap, a lot of people who have

felt that insurance was unaffordable will still feel that way," he said.

Danielle Holahan, deputy director of New York State of Health, said the health exchange's outreach and advertising efforts underscore the affordability of coverage.

"We have shown that the premiums have been reduced by 53 percent in New York, even before you take tax credits into account," she said.

California's latest radio and television campaign, called Welcome to Answers, "actually pounds home the issue of affordability," Lee said.

More information: Click here to visit [target=" new">Tell a Friend—Get Covered.](#)

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