



Consumer Federation of America

Avoid ID Theft and Fraud in the New Health Insurance Marketplace

Starting on October 1, 2013 people who don't have health insurance can buy coverage through the new "marketplaces" created under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Con artists follow the news, and even before October 1 they were contacting people asking for money, personal information, or both, supposedly to help them sign up for insurance. Here's what you need to know to avoid these scams.

- **Most people don't have to do anything.** If you already have health insurance through your employer, Medicare, Medicaid, your school, the Veteran's Administration, or some other program, you don't have to sign up, get a new insurance card or make any changes. The insurance marketplaces are only for people who don't have health insurance (including those who have lost their insurance). People who buy their own health insurance independently can switch to plans offered in the marketplaces if they desire.
- **Be careful if someone contacts you to sign you up.** The federal government is not calling or mailing letters to sign people up, but it may send emails to some people who tried to enroll for insurance through the federal website and couldn't because of glitches. Since it's hard to tell if emails are from legitimate sources or scammers trying to infect your computer or direct you to a phony website, it's always best not to click on links. Instead, type in the address of the federal website, www.HealthCare.gov, yourself or call the toll-free number, 1-800-318-2596 (TTY users can call 1-855-889-4325). Don't give your bank account number, Social Security number, or other personal information to anyone you did not contact or in response to an ad.
- **There is no rush.** People who are eligible to buy plans through the marketplaces have until March 31, 2014 to do so. After that, enrollment is open to anyone who wasn't eligible before that date but whose situation has changed – for instance, if you had health insurance through your job and became unemployed after March 31, 2014 or you were on your parents' insurance and later need your own.
- **Get all the information and compare plans to find the one that's best for you.** Through the federal website or hotline you can get answers to your questions about how the law works, learn about the plans that are available to you, and sign up. Some marketplaces are operated by the federal government, others by states – you'll be routed to the right place based on where you live. If you need more help, there are trained people in every state to assist you, free of charge. Their contact information is available from the website or hotline.
- **There is no application fee or charge to get help with the process.** The only thing that people will have to pay under the ACA is their monthly insurance bill (and some will qualify for free coverage or lower rates). If anyone wants to charge you for providing information or helping you sign up, it's a scam.
- **Report anything suspicious.** Call the federal hotline to report scams. If you think that you may be a victim of identity theft because you provided your personal information to someone you shouldn't have, you should also call your local police and the Federal Trade Commission's ID theft hotline, 1-877-438-4338 (TTY users can call 1-866-653-4261).
- **If you're looking for more information, get it from trusted sources.** AARP created a special website about the ACA, www.HeathLawAnswers.org. Consumers Union has an online brochure to help you understand the tax credits, see http://consumersunion.org/taxcredit/US_2014_EN.pdf (English) or http://consumersunion.org/taxcredit/spanish/US_2014_SP.pdf (Spanish). Additional tips about fraud are at www.healthcare.gov/how-can-i-protect-myself-from-fraud-in-the-health-insurance-marketplace/ and www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0394-suspect-a-health-care-scam.