



State hopes to follow up health care insurance success for 2015

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New London - In preparation for the reopening of enrollment for health insurance through the state's online marketplace, U.S. Sen. Chris Murphy visited the Community Health Center to learn about planned efforts to sign up the remaining 4 percent of the Connecticut population still without coverage.

"What can we expect in terms of outreach?" Murphy, D-Conn., asked a roomful of health center staff, state Reps. Elissa Wright, D-Groton, and Betsy Ritter, D-Waterford, and Mayor Daryl Justin Finizio.

Paul Mayer, vice president of marketing and communications for the health center, said there will be enrollment fairs tailored to specific groups, such as the one last year for restaurant workers, as well as a social media campaign and bilingual materials and staff for Spanish speakers. Outreach initiatives also are targeting uninsured parents of children who come to the center's school-based health clinics.

"Our overall message is that this is easy, and we are here to help you," Mayer said.

Access Health CT, the state's online marketplace, will be able to accept new enrollees from Nov. 15 through Feb. 15 for coverage for 2015. The goal for this enrollment period is to cut the number of the state's uninsured in half, to 2 percent, by enrolling about 33,000 people currently uninsured. During the inaugural enrollment period of the marketplace, created as the state's response to the federal Affordable Care Act, 256,000 people signed up for either private insurance through one of three companies, or Medicaid. About half of them previously had been uninsured. The state's uninsured rate before the marketplace opened was about 8 percent.

Shannon Bali, outreach and eligibility associate for the health center, said some of those who signed up in 2013 and were covered this year will need to renew their plans. Others who signed up for automatic renewal would not have to, she said. She advised anyone whose income or other circumstances have changed in the past year to check their plans and seek help if necessary to determine whether they need to do anything to ensure their coverage continues.

Margaret Flinter, senior vice president and clinical director of the Community Health Center, said many of the state's newly insured are seeking medical care at one of the center's 13 clinics around the state, prompting expansion of services at the New London center and others.

"We're now open all day Saturday, and we're looking to hire more primary care, behavioral health and dental providers," she said. The New London center also has been newly renovated and enlarged.

Yvette Highsmith, regional vice president for the health center, said about one in four city residents is a patient of the New London clinic. It serves a total of 12,000 people annually from the city and several surrounding communities.

Murphy said he considers the first year of Access Health CT a great success that he hopes will continue into the open enrollment period. Kevin Counihan, the marketplace's chief executive officer, was tapped in August to lead the federal and state marketplace in Washington, D.C. Since then, Jim Wadleigh has been serving as the acting chief executive officer of Access Health CT.

"It's fantastic to walk around the halls of Congress and have people look at us with envy in Connecticut that we got it right," Murphy said.

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