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Health Insurance Exchange Provides Opportunities for Montana's Uninsured

MISSOULA – Beginning next week Montanans will be able to sign up for the health insurance exchange. It will be a welcome opportunity for the 195,000 state residents who do not have health insurance, says Paul Polzin, interim director of the health care industry research program at the University of Montana's Bureau of Business and Economic Research.

Beginning Tuesday, Oct. 1, Montanans may go online to <https://www.healthcare.gov/marketplace/individual/>, where they can apply for individual health insurance, with plan coverage beginning Jan. 1, 2014. Polzin expects that more than 350,000 Montanans may change their health insurance as a result of the Affordable Care Act.

The “no-wrong-door approach” to applying for individual health coverage will direct applicants toward the appropriate insurance option such as Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program or private insurance policies sold in the marketplace. An article in the latest Montana Business Quarterly titled “A Preview of Montana's Health Insurance Marketplace” describes some of the changes that will occur under the exchange. The article was written by Gregg Davis and Christina Goe.

“In theory, the health insurance marketplace will enhance competition among health insurers while at the same time offering consumers the ability to make apples-to-apples comparisons of benefit designs, provider networks and limits on cost sharing,” the article says. “It is designed to operate similarly to the dozens of online travel sites that allow users to compare prices based on select criteria such as travel dates, destination and number of travelers.”

Polzin said that the new marketplace may make insurance more affordable because of the economies of scale and competition among insurance providers.

For more information on BBER's health care industry research, call Polzin at 406-243-5113 or email paul.polzin@business.umt.edu.

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