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Sign-up at Access Health CT tops 11,500 in first week of 2014 enrollment, officials say

NORWICH - More than 11,500 people have acquired medical insurance during the first week of year two enrollment in the Affordable Care Act, Access Health CT officials said on Friday – representing 16.5 percent of the targeted 70,000 the state hopes to sign up by mid-February.

On Monday, Access Health CT's call center experienced the third-highest volume since the exchange launched last year.

"We're trying to reach a much more targeted audience this year, and we're encouraged by the high call volume, steady website traffic and regular visitors to our enrollment centers," Access Health CT acting CEO James Wadleigh said in a statement. "Over the next 12 weeks, we have a lot of work to do to reach our goal and make sure everyone who wants to enroll in quality, affordable health care coverage is able to do so."

Through Thursday, 11,604 individuals have enrolled for insurance through Obamacare, with an additional 1,003 employees signing up with the Small Business Health Option, or SHOP.

This year, Access Health CT will run 10 mobile education and enrollment centers across the state. Two of them are in the Second Congressional District represented by of U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney.

Hours before Access Health CT released its numbers, Courtney visited the Norwich site at United Community and Family Services to get a status update.

"Last year, it (enrollment) was done in Eastern Connecticut on an ad hoc basis, basically with enrollment centers at libraries and other community gathering places and as a result, it was uneven," Courtney said. "Having a full-time storefront with business hours in places we know were hot spots a year ago is a better way to concentrate resources."

State leaders said more than 280,000 people obtained insurance either through Medicaid or the exchange in its first year – slashing the total statewide uninsured rate by more than 50 percent.

In its second year, Wadleigh said Access Health CT is looking to get about 75,000 more people connected with insurance – cutting in half the total number of estimated residents still without a plan.

In addition to the Norwich site, Access Health CT has partnered with Willimantic-based The Access Community Action Agency to open a center.

Even without dedicated Access Health CT employees last year, UCFS was able to sign up more than 1,000 people with in-house staff who were trained in the process, organization CEO Chuck Seeman said.

And even though it's being run out of UCFS, the enrollment center is open to all – not just clients of the nonprofit.

"This site is for Norwich, so we're having people coming in here who may or may not want to get their services here," he said. "But it's a perfect place to host this. It's on a bus line, you can see a nice waiting room, and there's privacy for the people signing up."



Congressman Joe Courtney talks with Debra Eastman and Claudia Epright both from Access Health CT, at the storefront location at the Edward and Mary Lord Health Center at UCFS Friday morning. Aaron Flaum/ NorwichBulletin.com

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