

Editorial: Health care landmark

Tuesday, April 1, 2014 5:27pm

Finally there is a moment to celebrate and embrace rather than defend and avoid. More than 7 million Americans signed up for health coverage through the Affordable Care Act exchanges, meeting the original goal and deserving of President Barack Obama's celebration Tuesday in the White House Rose Garden. The surge in signups for coverage despite computer issues and relentless partisan attacks is a significant accomplishment and reflects the enormous demand for affordable, accessible health insurance.

Meeting the target of 7 million enrolling in health coverage does not excuse the Obama administration's failure to roll out a workable website when the signup period began last fall. Imagine how many families would have signed up if the federal healthcare.gov website and all of the state exchanges had worked smoothly from the start. Imagine if the process had been as easy as buying a book or a song online. Imagine if there had been a unified national effort to sell the benefits of the health care law rather than all of the Republican attempts to kill it.

The number of people who get health coverage should rise even higher. While Monday was the deadline to sign up through the exchanges, there is a grace period for those who started to sign up but did not get finished because of computer issues or other problems. Others can seek a special enrollment period if they have been seriously ill, or if there were mistakes made by those helping them sign up or by insurance companies. While Tuesday was a day to celebrate, the real success of the first enrollment period won't become clear until there is more information about the ages and health of those who signed up, how many were previously uninsured and how many start paying their insurance premiums.

In Florida, more than 442,000 residents signed up for health coverage through the federal exchange by March 1, and nine out of 10 qualified for some help in paying their premiums. The final number should be significantly higher, thanks to remarkable efforts in recent days to sign up residents in Tampa, St. Petersburg and elsewhere. Florida has been meeting its goal for signups, with more residents signing up for coverage than any other state using the federal exchange besides Texas.

That success is tempered by the Florida Legislature's unconscionable refusal to accept \$51 billion in federal money over the next decade to expand Medicaid to cover more than 1 million uninsured poor Floridians. The result is more than 150,000 adults in Tampa Bay make too much to qualify for Medicaid now but not enough to qualify for federal subsidies that would help them buy insurance on the federal exchange. House Speaker Will Weatherford, R-Wesley Chapel, blocked the expansion last year, and a Senate bill to approve the Medicaid expansion has not even received a committee hearing this year. Health care reform is moving forward, and Tallahassee cannot remain in denial forever.

Tuesday was a day to mark a significant achievement in extending health care to more Floridians, but there is much more work to be done.

Editorial: Health care landmark 04/01/14

Articles and offers from around the Web

ADVERTISEMENT