

Dec. 15 deadline for health insurance applications

Individuals need to renew or apply for health insurance coverage before Dec. 15 to avoid paying significantly higher premiums or losing access to insurance and/or tax credits on Jan. 1, cautions the Minnesota Association of Health Underwriters.

Individuals who have purchased their own health insurance plans and are not covered through their employer or government plan may lose access to their tax credits or pay significantly higher premiums unless they actively renew their policy by the Dec. 15. And those who do not currently have insur-

ance will lose the ability to secure a Jan. 1 effective date if they do not apply for coverage by the December deadline.

"People can't be so distracted by holiday shopping that they fail to apply in time," Heidi Michaels, an agent and president-elect of the organization, said in a statement. "We don't want people to be shocked to discover in January that they have lost their ability to choose affordable health insurance coverage or have been renewed at a much higher cost."

Insurance companies have generally sent out

notices, but agents have found that some people have not read them or kept the information in mind.

"If you have a policy that expires Dec. 31, you can't wait until the latter part of the open enrollment period, even if you go through MNSure because you would be without coverage from Jan. 1 until the new policy takes effect, or renewed at a higher premium," Michaels said. "The average increase for renewals is 14.5 percent, but for PreferredOne policyholders it has averaged over 60 percent."

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