HEALTH INSURANCE EXCHANGE

Bugs and boo-boos: How is Obamacare signup going in Cayuga County?

4 HOURS AGO • SAMANTHA HOUSE | SAMANTHA.HOUSE@LEE.NET

The Affordable Care Act stepped onto the nation's stage this month — and tripped.

After years filled with protests and rallies, doomsday predictions and multiple schemes to defund the ACA, the enrollment period for Obamacare began Oct. 1 with a series of computer glitches that sparked a new wave of frustration.

And Cayuga County was not immune to the snags.

In the first days of the New York State Health Benefits Exchange's open enrollment period, Laurie Piccolo, executive director of the Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency, said her agency's navigators had trouble signing Cayuga and Seneca county residents up.

"I believe it was just some of the glitches of getting on to the system," she said. "The system was going down."

Along with having trouble logging on to the state's exchange, Piccolo said C/SCAA's navigators would get kicked off of the system halfway through enrolling residents.

The glitches experienced by New York navigators were reflected by consumers across the United States.

In Obamacare's debut week, residents attempting to enter healthcare.gov faced a plethora of problems.

Consumers got stuck in long, digital lines inside the site's virtual waiting room. Massive volleys of traffic overwhelmed the federal website. And programers had to shut the site down multiple times to make changes and upgrades.

The state's exchange experienced similar troubles.

According to The Associated Press, the state's website contained broken links and drew an unexpected amount of traffic, adding up to 10 million hits on its debut day.

Piccolo said the glitches have since been fixed.

"The software has improved greatly," she said. "The Department of Health is holding teleconferences every Tuesday and Thursday just to work through the kinks, to allow individual navigators to express their concerns."

Aside from the problems first presented by the exchange, Piccolo said the open enrollment period is now moving smoothly for C/SCAA's navigators.

"It's going fairly well," she said. "It has improved greatly since the beginning of the month."

Renee Strazzeri, a C/SCAA navigator based in Seneca County, agreed, stating that since state IT workers hammered out electronic kinks during the first two weeks of enrollment, she hasn't experienced any troubles.

"It hasn't been a problem for me lately," she said. "I was able to sign into the system just fine this morning."

Otherwise, Strazzeri said enrollment — so far — is "really good."

"I just, this past Saturday, enrolled two people, and they were very happy about it," she said.

Strazzeri said one of the residents she enrolled this weekend was previously uninsured, and will only be paying $47 per month through the exchange. The other resident had coverage, but would save $50 a month by procuring the state's insurance.

The Seneca County navigator said although she has entered many names into theexchange's system, she isn't sure how many have finished their applications.

Although C/SCAA is waiting to tally its numbers, Piccolo said one of her navigators has enrolled 17 residents so far. She said the total October numbers will be updated at the end of the month.

According to The Associated Press, 174,000 New Yorkers have completed applications to receive coverage under the state Exchange, and 37,030 are fully enrolled and have secured coverage.

Exchange sites in Cayuga, Seneca counties

WHERE: Cayuga/Seneca Community Action Agency, Site II, 1 Brookfield Place, Auburn.

WHEN: 12 p.m. to 4 p.m. Mondays, 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesdays, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Fridays and 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturdays

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WHERE: Auburn Housing Authority, 20 Thornton Ave., Auburn

WHEN: TBA

WHERE: Port Byron High School, 30 Maple Ave., Port Byron.

WHEN: 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Wednesdays

WHERE: Weedsport Free Library, 2795 E. Brutus St., Weedsport

WHEN: 2:15 p.m. to 6 p.m. Wednesdays

WHERE: Stewart B. Lang Memorial Library, 2577 E. Main St., Cato

WHEN: 2 pm. to 7 p.m. Thursdays

WHERE: Fair Haven Community Church, 13367 Richmond Ave., Fair Haven

WHEN: 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. every third Tuesday

WHERE: Scipio Town Hall, Route 34 and Quarry Road, Scipio Center

WHEN: 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. every second and fourth Monday, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. every first Saturday

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WHERE: Powers Library, 29 Church St., Moravia

WHEN: 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. every second, third and fourth Saturday

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WHERE: C/SCAA's Seneca County office, 23 Center St., Waterloo

WHEN: 2:30 p.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays, 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Fridays and 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. every second and fourth Saturday

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WHERE: Seneca Falls Community Center, 35 Water St., Seneca Falls

WHEN: 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Wednesdays

WHERE: Cayuga County Chamber of Commerce, 2 State St., Auburn

WHEN: 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesdays, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesdays, 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Thursdays, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Fridays and 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. every first and third Saturday

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INFO: To learn more about enrolling in the New York State Health Benefits Exchange, call (315) 252-7291. Office hours are subject to change. For an updated schedule, visit cscaa.com/health_benefit.html.

On the Web

To learn more about the New York State Health Benefits Exchange, visit nystateofhealth.ny.gov.

To learn more about the Affordable Care Act, visit healthcare.gov.