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Like it or not, implementation of President Barack Obama's signature healthcare law is set to start this month.

The Affordable Care Act, also known as Obamacare, was signed into law on March 23, 2010. With many of its mandates already in place, many more—including the individual mandate—will take effect on Jan. 1, 2014.

Next year, individuals must have some form of health insurance or face a fine of at least \$95 or up to 1 percent of their taxable income.

Employers with more than 50 full-time employees must provide health insurance or face fines of \$4,000 per employee.

According to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 13 percent of Nebraskans don't have health insurance. The open enrollment date is set for Oct. 1, with coverage starting on Jan. 1.

The law also creates health insurance marketplaces, which are websites that allow you to easily compare different plans.

Four Nebraska insurance companies have said they will offer packages through the marketplace: Blue Cross Blue Shield of Nebraska; Coventry Health Care; CoOpportunity Health and Health Alliance Midwest.

People who are already insured do not need to sign up through the new marketplaces. However, individuals may still shop around for the deal that is the most economical for them using these tools.

How Do Individuals Sign Up?

Community Action of Nebraska and the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska were selected to receive an estimated \$600,000 in federal grants to help people sign up. The money will be used to hire 62 people known as navigators to help walk people through the process. These navigators are only trained to help you sign up, not to provide any kind of financial advice. Both the uninsured and small business owners will be targeted.

Roger Furrer, executive director of Community Action of Nebraska, said a website will be up on Oct. 1 that will allow you to shop around for the best plan.

After that point, it gets more complicated. Furrer said people on the lower end of the pay scale would receive a larger tax credit, which would decrease as people made more money. People will get a credit if their income is at 400 percent of the poverty level or below, which is \$94,200 for a family of four.

As for how much people will pay, it's largely up in the air. Earlier this month, the Kaiser Foundation calculated state-based estimates for selected cities. It estimated a 40-year-old who lives in Omaha and earns \$28,725 a year would pay between \$119 and \$193 depending on the level of care and subsidies. For a 60-year-old in same situation, the range would be between \$36 and \$193.

Because of more people entering the insurance market, some people who already pay for insurance may end up paying more.

Individuals can also sign up at healthcare.gov.

What Do Business Owners Need To Do?

Business owners now have a few months to figure how to respond to the law. Marilyn Schlake,

agricultural economics assistant extension educator at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, recently organized a website to inform businesses how to respond to the ACA. Schlake said there are more options than saying “yes or no.”

Businesses can look around for the best plan in the Small Business Health options program, also known as the SHOP exchange. It functions similarly to the healthcare marketplace for uninsured individuals.

If a business has more than 50 full-time employees, it is required to provide some form of health insurance or face a fine by Jan. 1, 2015. The employee can then choose to take it or leave it. According to the Kaiser Foundation, roughly 57 percent of employers provide some form of health insurance.

Employers must provide plans that are deemed “affordable” by the ACA.

These plans must not cost more than 9.5 percent of an employee’s income, and most employees aren’t expected to pay for more than 40 percent of healthcare costs. If employers don’t do this, they could face fines.

For more information, visit <http://eship.unl.edu/web/etraining/healthcare-resource>