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AFFORDABLE CARE ACT OPEN ENROLLMENT STARTS SUNDAY; COVID-19 SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS BRING CHANGES TO SIGN-UP ASSISTANCE

Drive-up enrollment events, plus Plexiglas partitions for in-person help, will be among the changes.

Greenville, N.C. – Open Enrollment for 2021 Affordable Care Act (ACA) health insurance starts Sunday, with a broader range of insurance options available this year, plus significant changes in how local enrollment assistance is given.

Greenville-based nonprofit Access East’s Certified Marketplace Navigators will again provide unbiased, free ACA assistance, including enrollment help, to consumers seeking affordable quality health-coverage or a renewal of coverage, in different locations across 27 eastern North Carolina counties. However, Navigators will now structure in-person assistance to incorporate COVID-19 safety precautions.

“There will be no walk-ins,” explains Shantell Cheek, Access East Manager for Uninsured Programs. “Everything will be appointment-only; we have to be sure everyone is safe.”

Anyone showing up as a walk-in will be required to schedule a future appointment instead.

Consumers will have several options when scheduling one-on-one Navigator enrollment help: by phone; by WebEx or Zoom; in person; or via something entirely new, drive-up/curbside enrollment (see schedule of events, at right).

To schedule a Navigator appointment, call (252) 847-3027 or toll-free (877) 755-5438, or visit www.NCNavigator.net.

In-person enrollment stations will be physically distanced from each other, in either the Access East office or at the Vidant Health Monroe Conference Center; masks will be required (and provided) and hand sanitizer available; Plexiglas will separate Navigators and consumers; and enrollment stations will be wiped down with sanitizer between visits.

Masks will be required at drive-up/curbside visits as well.

Navigators will not only inform consumers of the new coverage offered this year, but also help eligible insurance seekers sign up for federal subsidies to offset the cost of premiums. Financial assistance is available to most consumers; in North Carolina, nine out of 10 people receive help paying for their ACA plans.

This year, with the presidential election and now a restructured U.S. Supreme Court, many consumers have expressed concern the ACA may be greatly changed, or eliminated. In even that worst-case scenario, notes Mark Van Arnem, Director of the statewide NC Navigator Consortium, people who have bought an ACA plan for 2021 “should be grandfathered in ... and still have coverage throughout the entire plan year.”

OFFICE HOURS FOR ASSISTANCE

ACA Open Enrollment, now in its eighth year, will run from Nov. 1- Dec. 15, 2020. Free Navigator assistance is available weekdays and Saturdays during those 45 days; appointments are required:

- ◆ Mondays, Wednesdays: 10 a.m.-7 p.m.
- ◆ Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays: 10 a.m.- 5 p.m.
- ◆ Saturdays: 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

There will be no office hours Nov. 25-29, in observance of Thanksgiving. Post-holiday Navigator assistance will resume Nov. 30.

DRIVE-UP/CURBSIDE ENROLLMENT EVENTS

Appointments required; *no* walk-in visits this year.

- ◆ Nov. 7 | Saturday, 10 a.m.- 4 p.m.; *Whitakers*, Franklinton Center at the Bricks, 281 Bricks Lane; COVID-19 TESTING ALSO AVAILABLE
- ◆ Nov. 14 | Saturday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.; *Greenville*, Access East, Stanton Square Shopping Center
- ◆ Nov. 21 | Saturday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.: *Greenville*, St. James United Methodist Church, 2000 E. 6th St.
- ◆ Dec. 5 | Saturday, time/place TBD: *Rocky Mount*
- ◆ Dec. 12 | Saturday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.: *Greenville*, St. James United Methodist Church, E. 6th St.
- ◆ Dec. 13 | Sunday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.: *Greenville*, Access East, Stanton Square Shopping Center

BRING WITH YOU TO ENROLLMENT EVENTS:

1. Social Security numbers for every family member, or document numbers for legal immigrants
2. Employer name(s) and phone number(s)
3. Income information for every member of a household who is working, or who has income and needs coverage
4. Information about any health insurance any household member might have