



New Health Insurance  
Tax Credits in Washington

Families USA

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**Help Is at Hand:  
New Health Insurance Tax Credits in Washington**

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**S**tarting in 2014, the Affordable Care Act will extend health coverage to millions of Americans. This will be done, in part, by offering tax credits to help low- and middle-income Americans afford private coverage. These new tax credits, which will offset a portion of the cost of health insurance premiums, will soon become a reality, allowing many previously uninsured Washingtonians to purchase quality health coverage.

This report takes a closer look at these premium tax credits in Washington, which will help Washingtonians with incomes up to four times the federal poverty level (\$94,200 for a family of four in 2013)<sup>1</sup> afford coverage. The unique structure of the tax credits means that people will be protected from having to spend more than a set percentage of their income on health insurance premiums. These premium tax credits will take effect in January 2014, following open enrollment that begins in October 2013.

Families USA commissioned The Lewin Group to use its widely respected Health Benefits Simulation Model to estimate how many people in Washington and across the country could benefit from the new premium tax credits in 2014. We found that nearly 598,000 Washingtonians will be eligible for the tax credits in 2014.

Most of the people who will be eligible for the tax credits will be in working families and will have incomes between two and four times poverty (between \$47,100 and \$94,200 for a family of four based on 2013 poverty guidelines). However, because the size of the tax credits will be determined on a sliding scale based on income, those with the lowest incomes will receive the largest tax credits, ensuring that the assistance is targeted to the people who need it most.

Every state, including Washington, will have a new health insurance marketplace (also called an exchange) that will make it easier for residents to gain health coverage. Though these new state marketplaces may look different, all of them will help individuals and families find coverage that meets their specific needs. The tax credits will help people who are looking for coverage in their state's marketplace better afford such coverage.

In order to maximize the number of people who receive the new tax credits, Washington and states across the country will need to develop robust outreach programs to educate consumers about this new help. The state marketplaces will need to offer insurance shoppers consumer-friendly, simple online enrollment processes, and they'll need to build complementary networks of assisters who can provide in-person, one-on-one help to anyone who needs it.

As this key part of the Affordable Care Act takes effect, many Washingtonians will enjoy tax relief. They will also enjoy the peace of mind that comes with knowing that they and their family members have affordable health insurance—insurance that they can depend on even if they experience changes in income or become unemployed.

The following examples illustrate the amount of assistance that different kinds of people could receive. For more details on the how to calculate premium tax credits, see “How Much Will the Tax Credits Be Worth?” on page 12.

**EXAMPLE** *Jane Smith, age 45, no children, annual income of \$23,000 (about 200 percent of poverty): If the annual premium for the silver reference plan in the state marketplace in Jane’s zip code is \$5,000, Jane’s out-of-pocket contribution for premiums for the silver reference plan would be about \$1,450 (or about \$121 a month). The remainder of her premium for the silver reference plan would be covered in the form of a tax credit of \$3,550 (or that amount could be credited toward the premiums for a more or less expensive plan of her choice).*

**EXAMPLE** *The Johnsons, a family of four (two adults, two children under age 18), annual income of \$35,300 (about 150 percent of poverty): If the annual premium for the silver reference plan for family coverage in the state marketplace in the Johnsons’ zip code is \$12,500, the Johnsons’ out-of-pocket contribution for premiums for a silver reference plan would be about \$1,410 (or about \$118 a month). The remainder of their premium for the silver reference plan would be covered in the form of a tax credit of \$11,090 (or that amount could be credited toward the premiums for a more or less expensive plan of their choice).*

Note that consumers will be able to select any health insurance plan that is available through the state marketplace in their area, and the law guarantees that there will be a range of plans with different coverage terms and different prices. Each family can pick the plan that meets their needs and still receive the same substantial premium tax credit. How much a family will have to spend on premiums will vary depending on whether they choose a plan that is more or less expensive than the silver level reference plan.

## Key Findings

Beginning in January 2014, new tax credits will be available that will significantly reduce the cost of private health insurance for individuals and families in Washington.

### Numbers of People Eligible for the Premium Tax Credit

- Statewide, nearly 598,000 Washingtonians will be eligible for these new premium tax credits in 2014 (see Table 1).
- People with annual incomes between 200 and 400 percent of poverty (between \$47,100 and \$94,200 for a family of four in 2013) will constitute about 57 percent of the Washingtonians who will be eligible for premium tax credits (see Table 1).

Table 1.  
Washingtonians Eligible for Premium Tax Credits, by Income, 2014

Income as a Percent of Federal Poverty Level	Number in Income Group Eligible	Income Group As a Percent of Those Eligible
0-199%	258,870	43.3%
200-399%	338,760	56.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>597,620</b>	<b>100%</b>

Notes: Estimates prepared by The Lewin Group for Families USA (methodology available upon request). Data are for those with incomes below 400 percent of the federal poverty level. Numbers may not add due to rounding.

### Help for Working Families

- The vast majority of Washingtonians who will be eligible for premium tax credits—about 88 percent—will be in working families.
- Statewide, more than 525,000 people, the majority of Washingtonians who will be eligible for premium tax credits, will be in families with a worker who is employed, either full- or part-time (see Table 2 on page 4).

Table 2.

**Washingtonians Eligible for Premium Tax Credits,  
By Employment Status, 2014**

Employment Status	Number in Employment Group Eligible	Employment Group As a Percent of Those Eligible
Employed*	525,320	87.9%
Not Employed*	72,310	12.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>597,620</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Notes:** Estimates prepared by The Lewin Group for Families USA (methodology available upon request). Data are for those with incomes below 400 percent of the federal poverty level. Numbers may not add due to rounding.

\* The category “employed” includes those employed both full- and part-time. “Not employed” includes those out of the workforce and those not looking for work.

## Help for All Ages

- Premium tax credits will be available to Washingtonians in all age groups, from hardworking Washingtonians who are supporting families to young people just starting their careers (see Table 3).
- Young adults are the likeliest age group to be eligible for premium tax credits, making up approximately 36 percent of all those who will be eligible (see Table 3).

Table 3.

**Washingtonians Eligible for Premium Tax Credits, by Age, 2014**

Age Group	Number in Age Group Eligible	Age Group as a Percent of Those Eligible
Under 18	129,300	21.6%
18-34	217,820	36.4%
35-54	172,950	28.9%
55 and over	77,560	13.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>597,620</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Notes:** Estimates prepared by The Lewin Group for Families USA (methodology available upon request). Data are for those with incomes below 400 percent of the federal poverty level. Numbers may not add due to rounding.

## Help for All Races and Ethnicities

- Approximately two-thirds (about 67 percent) of the Washingtonians who will be eligible for premium tax credits will be white, non-Hispanics (see Table 4).
- About 3 percent of the Washingtonians who will be eligible will be black, non-Hispanics (see Table 4).
- Approximately 16 percent of the Washingtonians who will be eligible will be Hispanics (see Table 4).
- Approximately 14 percent of the Washingtonians who will be eligible will identify themselves as being American Indian, Aleut or Eskimo, Asian or Pacific Islander, or a member of more than one group (see Table 4).

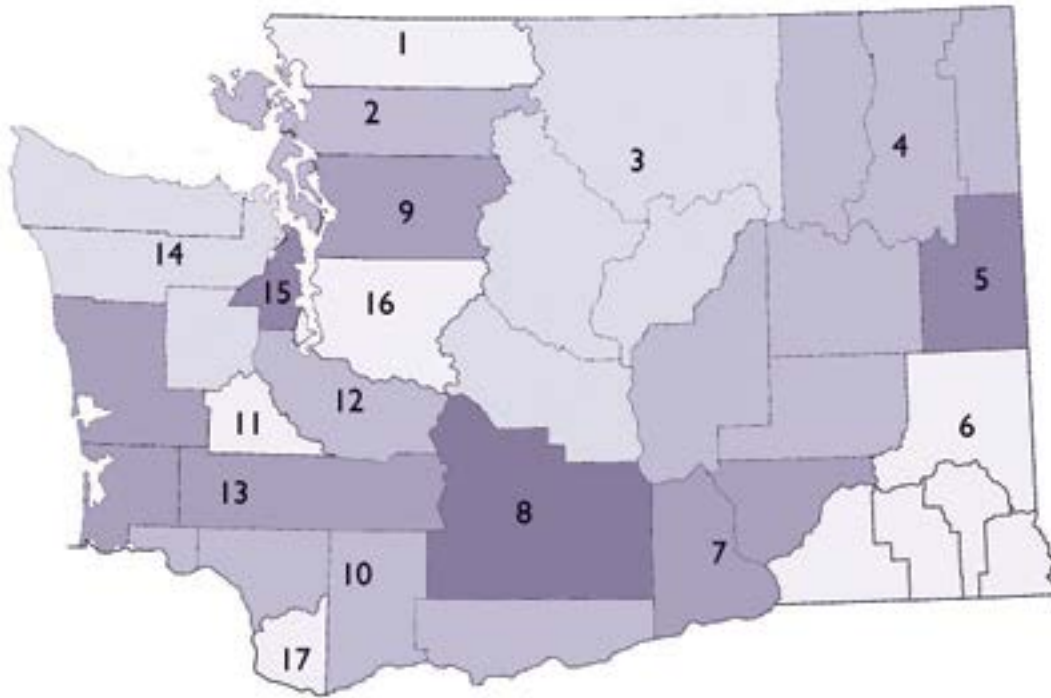
Table 4.

### Washingtonians Eligible for Premium Tax Credits, by Race/Ethnicity, 2014

Racial/Ethnic Group	Number in Racial/Ethnic Group Eligible	Racial/Ethnic Group As a Percent of Those Eligible
White, Non-Hispanic	402,480	67.3%
Black, Non-Hispanic	17,760	3.0%
Hispanic	93,030	15.6%
Other*	84,360	14.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>597,620</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Notes:** Estimates prepared by The Lewin Group for Families USA (methodology available upon request). Data are for those with incomes below 400 percent of the federal poverty level. Numbers may not add due to rounding.

\* The category "other" includes those who identify themselves as American Indian, Aleut or Eskimo, Asian or Pacific Islander, or a member of more than one group.



### Washington County Locations

- |   |   |    |   |
|---|---|----|---|
| 1 | Whatcom   | 9  | Snohomish                               |
| 2 | Island, San Juan, Skagit                            | 10 | Cowlitz, Klickitat, Skamania, Wahkiakum |
| 3 | Chelan, Douglas, Kittitas, Okanogan                 | 11 | Thurston                                |
| 4 | Adams, Ferry, Grant, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Stevens | 12 | Pierce                                  |
| 5 | Spokane   | 13 | Grays Harbor, Lewis, Pacific            |
| 6 | Asotin, Columbia, Garfield, Walla Walla, Whitman    | 14 | Clallam, Jefferson, Mason               |
| 7 | Benton, Franklin                                    | 15 | Kitsap                                  |
| 8 | Yakima  | 16 | King                                    |
|   |   | 17 | Clark                                   |



**Table 5. Washingtonians Eligible for Premium Tax Credits, Distribution by Income Level and County, 2014**

County Name(s)	Income as a Percent of Federal Poverty Level				Total Number
	0-199%		200-399%		
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
1 Whatcom	9,580	45.4%	11,500	54.6%	21,080
2 Island, San Juan, Skagit	7,650	39.1%	11,890	60.8%	19,540
3 Chelan, Douglas, Kittitas, Okanogan	9,320	47.3%	10,390	52.7%	19,710
4 Adams, Ferry, Grant, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Stevens	9,290	45.6%	11,070	54.4%	20,360
5 Spokane	17,890	41.3%	25,390	58.7%	43,280
6 Asotin, Columbia, Garfield, Walla Walla, Whitman	6,770	57.4%	5,020	42.6%	11,790
7 Benton, Franklin	10,260	45.1%	12,510	54.9%	22,770
8 Yakima	15,480	49.3%	15,950	50.7%	31,430
9 Snohomish	23,590	37.3%	39,610	62.7%	63,190
10 Cowlitz, Klickitat, Skamania, Wahkiakum	7,220	49.5%	7,360	50.5%	14,570
11 Thurston	8,710	42.0%	12,050	58.0%	20,760
12 Pierce	28,540	40.4%	42,070	59.6%	70,610
13 Grays Harbor, Lewis, Pacific	7,190	42.3%	9,800	57.7%	16,990
14 Clallam, Jefferson, Mason	7,230	44.2%	9,140	55.8%	16,370
15 Kitsap	8,890	44.8%	10,940	55.2%	19,830
16 King	63,710	44.1%	80,790	55.9%	144,500
17 Clark	17,560	43.0%	23,280	57.0%	40,840
<b>Total, all counties</b>	<b>258,870</b>	<b>43.3%</b>	<b>338,760</b>	<b>56.7%</b>	<b>597,620</b>

**Notes:** Estimates prepared by The Lewin Group for Families USA (methodology available upon request). Data are for those with incomes below 400 percent of the federal poverty level. Numbers may not add due to rounding.

**Table 6. Washingtonians Eligible for Premium Tax Credits, Distribution by Family Employment Status and County, 2014**

County Name(s)	Employed*		Not Employed*		Total Number
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
1 Whatcom	18,650	88.5%	2,420	11.5%	21,080
2 Island, San Juan, Skagit	17,020	87.1%	2,520	12.9%	19,540
3 Chelan, Douglas, Kittitas, Okanogan	17,640	89.5%	2,070	10.5%	19,710
4 Adams, Ferry, Grant, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Stevens	18,230	89.5%	2,130	10.5%	20,360
5 Spokane	38,640	89.3%	4,630	10.7%	43,280
6 Asotin, Columbia, Garfield, Walla Walla, Whitman	10,130	85.9%	1,670	14.1%	11,790
7 Benton, Franklin	20,350	89.3%	2,430	10.7%	22,770
8 Yakima	27,720	88.2%	3,720	11.8%	31,430
9 Snohomish	55,960	88.6%	7,230	11.4%	63,190
10 Cowlitz, Klickitat, Skamania, Wahkiakum	12,830	88.0%	1,750	12.0%	14,570
11 Thurston	18,310	88.2%	2,450	11.8%	20,760
12 Pierce	61,880	87.6%	8,730	12.4%	70,610
13 Grays Harbor, Lewis, Pacific	15,110	89.0%	1,880	11.0%	16,990
14 Clallam, Jefferson, Mason	14,410	88.1%	1,960	12.0%	16,370
15 Kitsap	17,120	86.3%	2,710	13.7%	19,830
16 King	124,970	86.5%	19,530	13.5%	144,500
17 Clark	36,350	89.0%	4,490	11.0%	40,840
<b>Total, all counties</b>	<b>525,320</b>	<b>87.9%</b>	<b>72,310</b>	<b>12.1%</b>	<b>597,620</b>

**Notes:** Estimates prepared by The Lewin Group for Families USA (methodology available upon request). Data are for those with incomes below 400 percent of the federal poverty level. Numbers may not add due to rounding.

\*The category “employed” includes those employed both full- and part-time. “Not employed” includes those out of the workforce and those not looking for work.

**Table 7. Washingtonians Eligible for Premium Tax Credits,  
Distribution by Age and County, 2014**

County Name(s)	Under 18		Age 18-34		Age 35-54		Age 55+		Total Number
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
1 Whatcom	4,240	20.1%	8,480	40.2%	5,660	26.8%	2,710	12.9%	21,080
2 Island, San Juan, Skagit	4,050	20.7%	6,810	34.8%	5,870	30.0%	2,820	14.4%	19,540
3 Chelan, Douglas, Kittitas, Okanogan	4,330	22.0%	7,170	36.4%	5,650	28.7%	2,560	13.0%	19,710
4 Adams, Ferry, Grant, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Stevens	5,000	24.6%	7,220	35.5%	5,960	29.3%	2,180	10.7%	20,360
5 Spokane	10,160	23.5%	16,040	37.1%	11,640	26.9%	5,440	12.6%	43,280
6 Asotin, Columbia, Garfield, Walla Walla, Whitman	2,310	19.6%	5,520	46.8%	2,580	21.8%	1,390	11.8%	11,790
7 Benton, Franklin	5,560	24.4%	8,840	38.8%	6,100	26.8%	2,270	10.0%	22,770
8 Yakima	7,680	24.4%	11,290	35.9%	9,080	28.9%	3,390	10.8%	31,430
9 Snohomish	14,560	23.0%	21,790	34.5%	18,430	29.2%	8,420	13.3%	63,190
10 Cowlitz, Klickitat, Skamania, Wahkiakum	3,440	23.6%	5,200	35.7%	3,900	26.8%	2,040	14.0%	14,570
11 Thurston	4,470	21.5%	7,930	38.2%	5,840	28.1%	2,520	12.1%	20,760
12 Pierce	15,870	22.5%	27,020	38.3%	20,160	28.6%	7,560	10.7%	70,610
13 Grays Harbor, Lewis, Pacific	3,660	21.5%	5,530	32.5%	5,300	31.2%	2,500	14.7%	16,990
14 Clallam, Jefferson, Mason	3,390	20.7%	5,250	32.1%	4,980	30.4%	2,760	16.9%	16,370
15 Kitsap	4,490	22.7%	7,020	35.4%	5,700	28.7%	2,620	13.2%	19,830
16 King	26,590	18.4%	51,890	35.9%	44,540	30.8%	21,490	14.9%	144,500
17 Clark	9,510	23.3%	14,840	36.3%	11,580	28.3%	4,910	12.0%	40,840
<b>Total, all counties</b>	<b>129,300</b>	<b>21.6%</b>	<b>217,820</b>	<b>36.4%</b>	<b>172,950</b>	<b>28.9%</b>	<b>77,560</b>	<b>13.0%</b>	<b>597,620</b>

Notes: Estimates prepared by The Lewin Group for Families USA (methodology available upon request). Data are for those with incomes below 400 percent of the federal poverty level. Numbers may not add due to rounding.

**Table 8. Washingtonians Eligible for Premium Tax Credits, Distribution by Race/Ethnicity and County, 2014**

County Name(s)	White, Non-Hispanic		Black, Non-Hispanic		Hispanic		Other*		Total Number
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
1 Whatcom	16,500	78.3%	140	0.7%	2,060	9.8%	2,370	11.2%	21,080
2 Island, San Juan, Skagit	14,620	74.8%	200	1.0%	3,110	15.9%	1,620	8.3%	19,540
3 Chelan, Douglas, Kittitas, Okanogan	13,160	66.8%	80	0.4%	5,160	26.2%	1,310	6.6%	19,710
4 Adams, Ferry, Grant, Lincoln, Pend Oreille, Stevens	12,700	62.4%	30	0.2%	6,220	30.5%	1,400	6.9%	20,360
5 Spokane	36,060	83.3%	670	1.5%	2,690	6.2%	3,860	8.9%	43,280
6 Asotin, Columbia, Garfield, Walla Walla, Whitman	9,440	80.0%	120	1.1%	1,270	10.7%	970	8.2%	11,790
7 Benton, Franklin	12,940	56.8%	300	1.3%	8,370	36.8%	1,160	5.1%	22,770
8 Yakima	12,410	39.5%	180	0.6%	16,000	50.9%	2,840	9.0%	31,430
9 Snohomish	43,410	68.7%	1,530	2.4%	7,680	12.2%	10,570	16.7%	63,190
10 Cowlitz, Klickitat, Skamania, Wahkiakum	11,680	80.2%	0	0.0%	1,760	12.1%	1,130	7.8%	14,570
11 Thurston	15,200	73.2%	570	2.7%	2,270	10.9%	2,720	13.1%	20,760
12 Pierce	46,410	65.7%	4,010	5.7%	9,260	13.1%	10,920	15.5%	70,610
13 Grays Harbor, Lewis, Pacific	13,640	80.3%	40	0.3%	1,880	11.1%	1,430	8.4%	16,990
14 Clallam, Jefferson, Mason	13,180	80.5%	50	0.3%	1,370	8.4%	1,770	10.8%	16,370
15 Kitsap	15,100	76.1%	480	2.4%	1,510	7.6%	2,740	13.8%	19,830
16 King	84,760	58.7%	8,650	6.0%	17,900	12.4%	33,180	23.0%	144,500
17 Clark	31,270	76.6%	700	1.7%	4,510	11.0%	4,370	10.7%	40,840
<b>Total, all counties</b>	<b>402,480</b>	<b>67.3%</b>	<b>17,760</b>	<b>3.0%</b>	<b>93,030</b>	<b>15.6%</b>	<b>84,360</b>	<b>14.1%</b>	<b>597,620</b>

Notes: Estimates prepared by The Lewin Group for Families USA (methodology available upon request). Data are for those with incomes below 400 percent of the federal poverty level. Numbers may not add due to rounding.

\* The category "other" includes those who identify themselves as American Indian, Aleut or Eskimo, Asian or Pacific Islander, or as a member of more than one group.

## Discussion

With the passage of the Affordable Care Act comes the promise of affordable health coverage for millions of Americans. In 2010-2011, approximately 961,000 Washingtonians were uninsured.<sup>2</sup> The new premium tax credits, which are entirely financed by the federal government, will provide much-needed relief to hundreds of thousands of low- to moderate-income uninsured and underinsured Washingtonians. This relief will ensure that they will be better able to purchase affordable private health insurance through the new health insurance marketplaces (see “The New Health Insurance Marketplaces” on page 14). Starting in October of this year, individuals and families can begin enrolling in the insurance marketplaces, and they will benefit from this tax relief when the new coverage begins in January 2014. Nearly 598,000 Washingtonians will be eligible for premium tax credits in the first year that the state marketplace is operational. The size of the credit that individuals and families will be eligible to receive will depend on their income, and the lower a person’s income, the larger his or her tax credit will be. This will ensure that the assistance goes to those who need it the most.

### Eligibility for Tax Credits

Generally, the tax credits will be available to uninsured individuals and families who have incomes between 138 and 400 percent of poverty (between \$15,860 and \$45,960 for an individual, and between \$32,500 and \$94,200 for a family of four in 2013). Some people with incomes below 138 percent of poverty who do not qualify for Medicaid (mainly immigrants who are legal residents but who have been in the United States for fewer than five years) will be eligible for tax credits as well. Workers who would have to pay more than 9.5 percent of their wages to participate in their employer’s plan, and workers whose employer plan pays less than 60 percent of the cost of covered benefits, will also be eligible for the tax credits to help purchase coverage in the state marketplaces.

### What Will Happen When a Family Receives a Tax Credit?

When a person or family qualifies for a tax credit, the dollars from the credit will flow directly to the health plan in which the individual or family enrolls, offsetting the total cost of the family’s health insurance premiums for that plan.

The tax credits will be fully advanceable. This means that the tax credit will be available to pay the premium at the time the person enrolls in a plan. Thus, families will not need to wait until their taxes have been filed and processed in order to receive the credit and enroll in coverage, nor will they need to pay the full premium at the time of enrollment and then wait to be reimbursed.

Finally, the tax credit will be refundable, which means that families with very low incomes who do not owe taxes will be eligible for these tax credits to assist with the cost of premiums. However, the majority of these very low-income families will be eligible for Medicaid, and hence, ineligible for premium tax credits.

## How Much Will the Tax Credits Be Worth?

As described earlier, the size of the tax credit that an individual or family will be eligible for will depend on the individual's or family's income. And how much coverage that credit will help buy will depend on the plan that the individual or family chooses. The new state marketplaces will offer a range of plans with four different coverage levels (from lowest to highest coverage level): bronze, silver, gold, and platinum. The calculations of the size of the tax credits will be linked to the second lowest-cost silver plan, also known as the "silver reference plan." Below, we describe how income and plan choice come together to determine what an individual or family will have to pay out of pocket.

- To determine the size of an individual's or family's tax credit, start with their income. The family's household income will be used to determine the maximum premium contribution the family must pay for a particular "reference plan," described below. This maximum amount—a maximum percentage of family income—will be based on a sliding scale, and those with the lowest incomes will pay the smallest proportion of their incomes on premiums.
- Next, identify the premiums for the second lowest-cost silver plan that is available to the individual or family in the area in which they live. The tax credit amount will be set so that the individual or family will not have to spend more than a specific percentage of their income on premiums for this plan. For example, a family of four with an income of \$47,100 a year would not have to pay more than 6.3 percent of their income toward premiums for a silver plan and would get a tax credit of \$9,530 (see Table 10). Therefore, they would not have to pay more than \$247 a month for the silver reference plan that covers their entire family.
- An individual or family will be free to pick any plan that is available through an exchange. However, the individual's or family's tax credit amount will be based on the premium for the silver reference plan. If a consumer selects a more expensive plan, he or she will pay the difference in price between this more expensive plan and the silver reference plan out of pocket. If a consumer selects a cheaper plan, he or she will still receive the tax credit amount based on the silver reference plan and thus will spend less out of pocket on the premiums for this cheaper plan.
- In addition to premium assistance, some families will be eligible for more help with copayments, deductibles, and other cost-sharing. However, this help is available only for those who choose a silver plan (see "Additional Help with Out-of-Pocket Health Care Costs" on page 15).

Table 9.

**Examples of Premium Tax Credits for an Individual**

Income		Premium Contribution as a Percent of Income	Example of Premium Tax Credit
Income as a Percent of Poverty	Annual Income		
138%	\$15,860	3.3%	\$4,480
150%	\$17,235	4.0%	\$4,310
200%	\$22,980	6.3%	\$3,550
250%	\$28,725	8.1%	\$2,690
300%	\$34,470	9.5%	\$1,730
400%	\$45,960	9.5%	\$630

**Note:** Based on an individual with premiums of \$5,000 and 2013 federal poverty levels.

Table 10.

**Examples of Premium Tax Credits for a Family of Four**

Income		Premium Contribution as a Percent of Income	Example of Premium Tax Credit
Income as a Percent of Poverty	Annual Income		
138%	\$32,500	3.3%	\$11,430
150%	\$35,325	4.0%	\$11,090
200%	\$47,100	6.3%	\$9,530
250%	\$58,875	8.1%	\$7,760
300%	\$70,650	9.5%	\$5,790
400%	\$94,200	9.5%	\$3,550

**Note:** Based on a family of four with premiums of \$12,500 and 2013 federal poverty levels.

## The New Health Insurance Marketplaces

The Affordable Care Act requires every state to have a new regulated insurance marketplace, or exchange, where consumers and small businesses can purchase health insurance plans and apply for help with the cost of coverage. While every state must have a new marketplace, states are taking different approaches to getting the job done. Some states are setting up their own marketplaces, other states are partnering with the federal government to take on specific tasks and functions, and in some states, the federal government will establish the new marketplaces. Regardless of the approach, every marketplace will provide important new consumer protections.

When shopping in the new marketplaces, consumers and small businesses will know what they are getting for their money. All plans sold in the marketplaces must meet certain consumer protection and quality standards so that shoppers do not end up with surprising holes in their coverage. The new marketplaces will, among other things, certify that plans meet minimum requirements, such as having sufficient provider networks, implementing user-friendly quality reporting, and using marketing materials that are fair and accurate. Insurance companies will have to clearly explain what care is covered in every plan and at what cost. This information must be presented in a standardized, consumer-friendly format. This transparency will help people shop

for the best plan for the price, *and* it will promote competition among plans. Under the Affordable Care Act, insurers that sell plans in the new marketplaces—just like plans that are sold outside the exchanges—will not be allowed to deny coverage to people with pre-existing conditions or to charge exorbitant premiums, which will keep costs down for individuals and businesses.

The new marketplaces will be a one-stop shop where consumers can enroll in health coverage. These new marketplaces will help consumers apply for the new premium tax credits, and they will calculate the amount of the tax credit that consumers will receive. The marketplaces will also help lower-income consumers apply for Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), and other public programs. All marketplaces will use one standardized application that is designed to help consumers find out which coverage and financial assistance options they are eligible for. They will also be required to have consumer-friendly websites, as well as toll-free telephone help lines. Perhaps most importantly, every marketplace will have a network of people who are trained and certified to conduct public education and outreach, and to provide in-person assistance with the application process for premium tax credits, Medicaid, and CHIP. These assisters will also help shoppers select the insurance option that best meets their needs.



## Comprehensive Coverage under the Affordable Care Act

Under the Affordable Care Act, health insurance plans must meet a set of minimum requirements to ensure that consumers are getting the coverage they need. All plans that are sold directly to individuals and small businesses must cover a package of “essential health benefits.” The general categories of required services in this package include outpatient care, emergency care, hospitalization, prescription drugs, maternity and newborn care, mental health and substance abuse treatment, rehabilitative and habilitative care, laboratory services, preventive and wellness services, chronic disease management, and pediatric services (including dental and vision care). Together, the premium tax credits and these essential health benefit requirements will ensure that those who buy insurance in the new marketplaces will be getting *affordable*, comprehensive coverage.

## Additional Help with Out-of-Pocket Health Care Costs

The Affordable Care Act has a number of provisions that are meant to protect individuals and families from high out-of-pocket spending. Annual and lifetime dollar caps on covered benefits will no longer be permitted. This means that consumers who pay for health coverage won't run out of coverage if they develop health problems that are costly to treat. The Affordable Care Act also established caps on the amount an individual or family has to spend on out-of-pocket costs (i.e., deductibles, copayments, and co-insurance) for health services that are part of the essential benefits packages. Furthermore, additional cost-sharing assistance will be available to individuals and families with incomes up to 250 percent of poverty (about \$28,725 for an individual or \$58,875 for a family of four in 2013). This cost-sharing assistance will increase the proportion of health care costs that an individual or family's plan pays for. It will be available to people who purchase silver plans in the new health insurance marketplaces.

## Conclusion

Health reform will provide significant help to nearly 598,000 Washingtonians who will become eligible for premium tax credits in 2014. This assistance, along with several important new consumer protections, will allow individuals and families to purchase affordable health coverage even if they have pre-existing conditions, and even if they change jobs or experience a drop in income. This, in turn, means added economic security for Washington's working families. As we draw closer to October 2013, when open enrollment begins, it is critical that states and the federal government work closely together to educate the public about how the new tax credits will work and to make it as simple as possible to connect people to this significant new source of help with the cost of health insurance.

## Assumptions about the Population Eligible for Premium Tax Credits

The premium tax credits are available only to uninsured people with family incomes at or above 100 percent of the federal poverty level. This is because those who crafted the health care law assumed that uninsured people with incomes below 100 percent of poverty would be enrolled in Medicaid. Medicaid provides out-of-pocket spending protections and additional benefits that are important for coverage to be meaningful for people with such low incomes. If Washington does not expand its Medicaid program, most uninsured people with family incomes below 100 percent of poverty will be left without any financial help or affordable insurance options. States that refuse to expand Medicaid, despite the generous federal support offered, will be condemning their most vulnerable residents to remain in the ranks of the uninsured.

For our analysis, we assumed that Washington will take advantage of the opportunity to expand Medicaid to all Washingtonians with incomes up to 138 percent\* of the federal poverty level (\$15,860 for an individual or \$32,500 for a family of four in 2013). Under the Affordable Care Act, Washingtonians who are eligible for Medicaid (that is, all families with incomes at or below 138 percent of the federal poverty level) will not be eligible for premium tax credits.

Our analysis also takes into account one exception to the income eligibility rules for premium tax credits: The Affordable Care Act allows any legal U.S. residents who are not eligible for Medicaid due to the Medicaid program's five-year ban rule (even if they have income below 100 percent of poverty) to receive premium tax credits. Therefore, our estimates of the number of people who will be eligible for premium tax credits do include legal residents with incomes below 138 percent of poverty who would not be eligible for Medicaid under the five-year ban rule.

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\*Under the Affordable Care Act, the first 5 percent of income is not counted, or "disregarded." This means that the eligibility threshold for Medicaid is 138 percent of poverty, not 133 percent of poverty.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Office of the Assistant Secretary of Planning and Evaluation, *2013 Federal Poverty Guidelines* (Washington: Department of Health and Human Services, January 24, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Families USA analysis of U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey, *Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2013*, using the CPS Table Creator, available online at <http://www.census.gov/cps/data/cpstablecreator.html>.

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