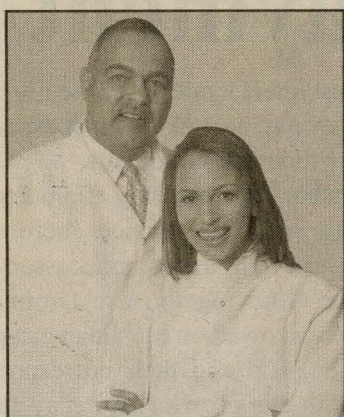


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8,000 State Health Applicants Given Wrong Tax Credit

By Donna Gordon
Blankinship
Associated Press

(AP) - Officials with Washington state's new health exchange announced Friday that 8,000 insurance applicants erroneously qualified for higher tax credits because of a system error.

Richard Onizuka, CEO for the Washington Health Benefit Exchange, said the system error was uncovered and corrected this week. The problem was traced to an inconsistency in file formats that were being shared between the Washington Healthplan-finder and federal data.

Onizuka said the error "caused applicants to qualify for higher than expected tax credit amounts than allowed based on their income level or household size."

"The Exchange is very disappointed to have discovered this issue and we find the situation unacceptable," he said in a statement. "Our staff will not stop working until we have notified all those affected and helped each and every one of our customers ensure they have the correct tax credit amount and can choose the best plan to meet their needs and budget."

Health exchange officials said that they are in the process of notifying applicants who were affected. Exchange spokeswoman Bethany Frey said that of the 8,000 affected, 3,400 were completely enrolled and had submitted payment, but that those payments had not yet been processed. The rest had completed their applications but had not yet submitted payment.

The error is the largest acknowledged since the web-based application's

shaky launch at the beginning of the month. Even though the site hasn't left all its errors and glitches behind, thousands are signing up for health insurance each week and the program has moved from startup to maintenance, said Michael Marchand, spokesman for the Washington Health Benefit Exchange, which runs the website, a call center and outreach efforts across the state.

After trying to sign up during the first few days of October and failing, William Towey logged back in a few days later and had health insurance in under 30 minutes.

On Jan. 1, the 48-year-old, self-employed handyman from Tacoma will be covered by health insurance for the first time in more than a decade.

"I've got a reasonably secure, modest lifestyle," Towey said. "I don't have a lot but I feel like I've made progress over the years, but I'm in no position to deal with a large medical bill."

Towey said he shopped for health insurance about a year ago but gave up when he found it would have cost between \$400 and \$500 a month. The plan he signed up for this month will cost about half that amount.

Marchand summarized the biggest problems keeping people from using the website during its first days of operation as:

- Communication problems between the state site and the federal government;
- Choke points where a lot of data was being uploaded by a lot of people at the same time;
- People entering the wrong kind of information or in the wrong format or using characters the program couldn't read, such as ampersands.

City Council Seeks Candidates For The OPA Review Board

The Seattle City Council is seeking candidates for the Office of Professional Accountability

(OPA) Review Board. The Review Board serves the City's police accountability system and works closely

Some of those issues were fixed in the first few days; others have required an ongoing process of responding to error reports, complaints to the call center and comments on social media, Marchand said. Helpful hints also have been imbedded into the site now, reminding users to do certain things.

Volumes at the call center have been many times greater than expected, in part because of all the error messages on the website. The call center, where people can ask for help or can set up their account and shop for insurance with help from a real person, was staffed to answer about 2,500 calls a day, but the reality has been an average of 6,000 calls a day and up to 10,000 on some days.

The exchange is hiring about 80 additional people for the call center to decrease wait times, as call volume is expected to remain high through December.

About 35,000 Washington residents have signed up for insurance through the exchange since it opened on Oct. 1. Another 56,000 people have completed online applications for insurance but won't officially be signed up until they pay the insurance company. Those payments are due in December for coverage that begins in January.

Another 20,000 have created an account on the website but have not signed up for insurance. Nearly 300,000 more have taken a look at the site but haven't registered.

Before health care reform went into effect, an estimated 1 million Washington residents did not have health insurance.

with the civilian OPA Director and the civilian OPA Auditor.

The OPA Review Board recommends best practices for reform with regard to police accountability oversight. There are four open positions on the seven-member Board. The Board will also work with the 15-member Community Police Commission (CPC) to assist in the reform efforts embodied in the Settlement Agreement and Memorandum of Understanding instituted by the Department of Justice.

Additional responsibilities of the OPA Review Board include reviewing the handling process for police accountability complaints, holding community outreach events to receive community feedback, and researching national trends to determine effective and innovative measures in the area of police accountability and civilian law enforcement oversight. The OPA Review Board delivers its findings and recommendations to the City Council twice a year.

Interested candidates should deliver a resume, cover letter, and the names and contact information of three references by **5 p.m. on Friday, November 15th** to Councilmember Bruce Harrell by email bruce.harrell@seattle.gov, by fax (206-684-8587; provide cover memo with Attn: Bruce Harrell) or by mail to: Councilmember Bruce Harrell, Seattle City Council, P.O. Box 34025, Seattle, WA 98124-4025

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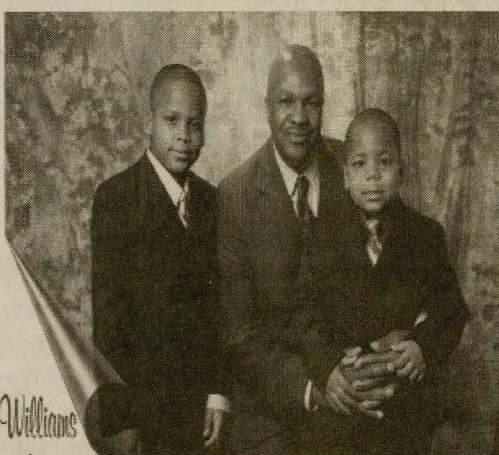
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Tacoma Convention Center
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Tuesday, Nov. 19
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