

SMALL BUSINESS SATURDAY is Saturday, November 29. This is a national day focusing attention on small, local businesses. Details on how to promote your business during small business Saturday, as well as more information on the day itself at <https://www.americanexpress.com/us/small-business/Shop-Small/>

Open Enrollment of the Health Insurance Marketplace will begin on November 15 and last until February 15. Open enrollment allows new people to sign up for health insurance on the Health insurance Marketplace. It also allows people who have a plan to change to another option. Go to <https://www.healthcare.gov/> to sign up or to change plans.

The Health Insurance Marketplace ranks all health insurance plans into four categories: platinum, gold, silver and bronze. The four categories represent the fiscal coverage of the plans. All platinum plans will cover roughly 90 percent of health care costs; gold plans will cover roughly 80 percent of health care costs; silver 70 percent; and bronze 60 percent. The categories allow folks to compare different health insurance policies much more easily.

The special section of the Health Insurance Marketplace for small businesses will be running when open enrollment begins on November 15. This section, called the SHOP, is being tested in six states right now. The SHOP will provide small businesses access to effective small group insurance plans. Just like for individuals, small business will benefit from greater buying power. In fact, the *Washington Post* is reporting on a study that found SHOP rates were seven percent lower than rates in the existing markets. (http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/on-small-business/study-shows-obamacares-small-business-exchanges-do-offer-cheaper-coverage/2014/09/24/8a79db7e-4409-11e4-b437-1a7368204804_story.html) Small businesses will also be able to take advantage of the tax credit for purchasing health insurance on the SHOP.

The *Washington Post* is reporting a study that found that employer health benefit costs increased last year at the lowest level since 1999. (http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/on-small-business/companies-health-costs-are-increasing-at-a-slower-clip-question-is-will-that-continue/2014/09/21/4eb917fc-4031-11e4-b0ea-8141703bbf6f_story.html)

A new Department of Health and Human Services study found that the average person in the Health Insurance Marketplace is paying \$82 a month for coverage, with 46 percent of people paying less than \$50 a month. This is the cost after government tax credits. Keep in mind that this is slightly more comprehensive coverage than existed prior to the Affordable Care Act. The study also showed that people buying in the federal exchange had a choice of 47 health plans, offered by an average of five different insurance companies. The study, available at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/health/reports/2014/Premiums/2014MktPlacePremBrf.pdf> shows that the average cost in Virginia was \$77 a month.

The U.S. Supreme Court will again be taking up the issue of health care reform. The Justices will decide if the tax credits available to help people buy health insurance are legal in states where the federal government is running the Health Insurance Marketplace (like Virginia). While most of the law talks about these tax credits being available to everyone, one section refers to Marketplaces “established by the states”. Opponents have seized on this language to argue that tax credits are NOT legal in Marketplaces established by the federal government. Several legislators who helped write the law penned a *Washington Post* Op/Ed on the issue: http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/affordable-care-act-opponents-are-cherry-picking-their-history/2014/10/30/2199a04e-5fac-11e4-91f7-5d89b5e8c251_story.html

Governor Terry McAuliffe has ordered more state contracts to be awarded to small and minority-owned businesses. The state will now award 42 percent of state contracts to small and minority-owned firms. The Governor is also creating a new “microbusiness” category of firms with 25 or fewer employees in order to increase the share of state contracts awarded to small businesses. See <http://www.vdba.virginia.gov/guide/index.html> for more information on all the state resources for small business