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“Library Helps Patrons Learn about Affordable Care Act”



Judy Hilkemann, Norfolk Public Library Reference Supervisor, helps patrons use online library resources but this week she's also helping them learn about the Affordable Care Act (commonly known as Obamacare).

Public libraries across the nation have been promoted by the federal government as resources not only for information about the new health insurance marketplace but to provide the computers and Internet access to enroll in the program.

“We offer 24 public computers that people can use twice a day for an hour each time. It gives patrons a way to log into the healthcare.gov site. We also have a link on the library's webpage to the site where they need to go to apply,” said Hilkemann.

The library's reference staff has been trained in directing patrons to the site and answering basic questions about the new program.

Unfortunately, so many people across the nation have been trying to use the site that it's been unavailable to library patrons this week.

Hilkemann said the staff has been fielding questions on the phone and from walk-ins who want to know if it's something they're doing wrong or if their computer isn't working correctly.

“What we've done this week to help people is to reassure them that they aren't the only ones not able to access the site. Even the 800 number

that has been offered to people is backlogged. We can still provide handouts and answer some of the most common questions patrons have,” Hilkemann said.

She received training on the new healthcare program through the Nebraska Library Commission and attended a local Nebraska Department of Insurance presentation on the topic.

Presenters told those in attendance that an important aspect of the sign up was to make sure people weren't going to fraudulent or copycat sites that would cull personal information.

"When people come into the library to get a unique log-in at the healthcare.gov site they also need to bring their W2 form or wage and tax statements, pay stubs, and their social security or resident number. We'll help make sure they are at the correct site when they go to enter that information," Hilkemann said.

The librarians can help patrons access the website (when it starts working again) and answer questions that they may have but they can't advise what personal choices they need to make on their health insurance.

"The Library Commission advised us to take the same approach as when we provide income tax information to people. We lead them to the site, give what information we have but the final decision of what product to buy will have to be theirs," Hilkemann said.

The library will be sponsoring an Affordable Care Act informational program on November 5 at 6:30 p.m. A Navigator, or someone who has been specifically trained by the government to give citizens detailed information about the Affordable Care Act, will be part of the program and will be available to answer questions. A Navigator from the Ponca Tribe will also be available at the library during some of the Native Culture Series presentations at the library on Tuesdays at the library in October.

"The federal government has put public libraries as a place to begin and as a source of help. It's another valuable service that the library can provide," Hilkemann said.

For more information about the Affordable Care Act, go to ci.norfolk.ne.us/library or call the library at 402-844-2100.