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Week 1 for Covered California: 16,000 Applications Complete



Covered California executive director Peter Lee speaking to advocates and reporters in San Francisco on Oct. 1. (Angela Hart/KQED)

Officials with Covered California, the state's health insurance marketplace, announced their first week's results Tuesday morning, and they were pretty happy about the numbers:

- 987,440 unique visitors
- 16,311 applications completed
- 27,305 applications partially completed

"These are big numbers and they're proof of the pent-up demand for coverage that is here in California and also across the nation," said Peter Lee, executive director of Covered California.

The three call centers around the state handled 59,003 calls. Lee pointed out that long wait times were cut to less than 4 minutes by last Friday.

At a meeting of health advocates in downtown Oakland, Ellen Wu, executive director of the California Pan-Ethnic Health Network let out what can only be termed a squeal of delight when she announced the numbers at the event.

"They sound great, don't they?" Wu said. "It's very exciting, ... shows that it's working." Wu also joked that advocates had been afraid to visit the Covered California website during its first few days, out of fear of making it crash. "None of us wanted to be the one to bring it down," she said.

The Covered California statistics cover Oct. 1-5, Monday to Saturday of last week. If you're wondering what a "partially completed" application means, think of logging on, creating an account, starting the enrollment process, then logging off to complete the task later.

Many Californians have been very excited about their new options, including **Paul Cello** of San Francisco, who signed up for a Blue Shield PPO last week. "It's a whole 'nother world," he said.

An application may cover more than one person, such as a spouse or children. Covered California says the completed applications include 28,699 individuals. Formal enrollment numbers will not be released until mid-November when people can actually begin paying their premiums.


Covered California had not released projections for the first week of sign ups, so it's hard to put Tuesday's numbers in perspective. Still, the Associated Press reported a comparison to numbers from another state:

... 15,000 applications were completed by Monday in Kentucky, a state with a population that is less than 12 percent of California's. Almost half of those applicants went on to buy an insurance plan, according to the Kentucky governor's office.

On Tuesday, Covered California also added a provider directory to its website, so that consumers can see if their doctor is in a health plan. This is a critical issue as many Covered California insurance plans have **narrow networks of providers**.

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