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## **Obamacare Deadline: Next Monday!**

By Wes Rivers

As winter is finally coming to a close—we hope—so too is the opportunity to purchase affordable and quality health insurance. **Next Monday, March 31, is the Obamacare open-enrollment deadline.** After this day, DC residents without health insurance will not be able to get coverage through Obamacare until next January and may be subject to a financial penalty. To avoid this outcome, DC Health Link and community groups across the city are making a final push to sign up residents.

DC Health Link—the District's on-line health exchange created through Obamacare—offers competitively priced health plans that include consumer protections not previously required of private-market plans. These include broad networks of doctors and specialists, as well robust coverage of mental health and substance abuse services. DC Health Link also offers financial assistance that make health plans more affordable.

Residents have until March 31 to enroll in a health plan with coverage through 2014. If they fail to sign up and do not have insurance, they face a fine of \$95 or 1 percent of their income, whichever is more, due to the individual mandate. For those who might have health coverage now, but experience a life-change such as a job loss or divorce during the year, there will be additional opportunities to get coverage through the exchange.

More than 30,000 residents have signed up for Medicaid or private health coverage through DC Health Link, but there are many more who are eligible. To assist residents, DC Health Link and community-based organizations are hosting enrollment and education events to sign up last-minute shoppers.

"One Touch Centers" will have Health Link-trained assisters and health insurance brokers who need assistance selecting a plan. Caseworkers from the Department of Human Services will also be on hand to help Medicaid-eligible residents apply for coverage. Public libraries, local universities, and places of worship are also conducting open enrollment events. Everyone will be out in the community this weekend to promote the importance of health insurance and encourage residents to get covered.

As the first open-enrollment comes to a close, it is important to reflect on the progress DC has made and the opportunities that lie ahead. Broad health coverage is the first step to a healthier city, but as the District moves forward, leadership will need to pursue policies that allow residents to continue to afford that coverage and will improve the quality of health services delivered.

To get more information, visit www.dchealthlink.org.