

Opinion: Barton working to get residents insurance

By Leanne Wagoner

Signing up for health insurance can be a frustrating and time-consuming process. To ease the insurance buying process, Barton Health has stepped up by partnering with Covered California, California's Insurance Exchange Marketplace, to assist our community members and provide certified enrollment counselors for the uninsured.

Barton enrollment counselors help California residents navigate through CoveredCA.com, where they can select insurance in an open market setting. Even though Covered California does not reimburse Barton for the enrollment counselors, we felt it was important to donate staff time to support our community during this difficult transition.

So far, counselors have delivered complimentary enrollment sessions at the Family Resource Center, Lake Tahoe Community College and South Lake Tahoe Library. Enrollment Counselors. The English and Spanish speakers have assisted over 75 Lake Tahoe families and households.



Barton enrollment counselors also provide free one-on-one assistance to community members. Additional Barton staff, volunteers, and counselors have fielded nearly 200 phone calls and completed over 60 one-on-one appointments.

I'd like to extend my great appreciation to Barton's certified enrollment counselors who have taken the extra time to train and then assist our community members. Barton's 16 enrollment counselors include employees from Barton Community Health Center, patient accounting, customer service and admitting and

have taken on this responsibility in addition to their regular jobs. Counselors took part in a rigorous certification process. All counselors completed 20 hours of training, a certification exam, and thorough background checks. As of Dec. 15, Barton has donated almost 600 hours of employee time to help during this major change in our nation's healthcare system.

Though Barton cannot control the marketplace's glitches, our enrollment counselors can offer information, assistance, and patience. One local self-employed, small business owner who signed up during Barton's enrollment session stated, "Thank you from the bottom of my heart, you have helped me so much and saved me hundreds of dollars each month."

We feel it is important for our community to understand that they have options, and we are proud that we are able to help those who need enrollment assistance.

The clock is ticking to sign up for insurance. To start receiving medical coverage on Jan. 1, uninsured community members must enroll by Dec. 23. California residents sign up [here](#), and Nevada residents [here](#). If you currently do not have medical coverage, community members can enroll in the insurance marketplace until March 31, 2014, to avoid paying a penalty tax.

Local one-on-one enrollment assistance with Barton is available by appointment, or residents can call local certified enrollment brokers. A list is available online or on Covered California's website above. Barton Health enrollment sessions in South Lake Tahoe are scheduled throughout January. You can find dates and details online or by calling (530) 543.5537.

Leanne Wagoner is Barton Health's community outreach coordinator.