

Sebelius admits: Health exchange launch 'rockier than we would have liked'

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Kathleen Sebelius. Photo: U.S. Dept of Health & Human Services

HHS secretary said improvements under way at HealthCare.gov website.

(HealthDay)—U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius admitted Wednesday that the troubled launch of the federal government's new health insurance exchange hasn't gone as planned.

However, she said technicians were working to fix the glitches that have plagued the HealthCare.gov website, and improvements should be evident shortly to consumers, the *Cincinnati Enquirer* reported Wednesday.

"I'll be the first to tell you, the website launch was rockier than we would have liked," Sebelius, a Cincinnati native, said during a visit to a community college in her hometown.

"There have been vast improvements, but we are still not satisfied. We want this to be as seamless as possible," she said.

The federal exchange, which serves 36 states, and related ones run by the other states are key components of the Affordable Care Act, the Obama administration's broad yet controversial health-reform package designed to bring insurance to tens of millions of Americans who lack coverage.

Federal officials initially blamed the problems with HealthCare.gov on high visitor traffic to the website. They later acknowledged design and software problems that have made it difficult for curious consumers to navigate the site.

U.S. health officials have said they see the heavy traffic on HealthCare.gov as an indication of the demand for [health insurance](#). The Obama administration hopes to enroll 7 million uninsured people through the federal and state health exchanges by the end of March 2014.

Several Republican lawmakers have been critical of Sebelius' department's handling of the launch and have called for her to step down, *The New York Times* reported Wednesday. One legislator, Kansas Sen. Pat Roberts, a longtime friend of the Sebelius family, said she should take responsibility for the problems. He accused Sebelius of "gross incompetence," adding, "We need new leadership."

Rep. John Fleming, R-Louisiana, called for Sebelius to resign or be fired, the *Times* reported. "Taxpayers should not have to tolerate this kind of waste and incompetence," he said.

White House press secretary Jay Carney said Sebelius had "the full confidence of the president," according to the *Times*.

A poll released last week of consumer satisfaction with the Affordable Care Act's health insurance exchanges confirmed what headlines have been saying since the online marketplaces' launch on Oct. 1: things have not gone smoothly.

Forty percent of Americans said the introduction of the insurance exchanges hadn't gone well, 20 percent said it had gone somewhat well and 30 percent had no opinion. Just 7 percent said the launch had gone "very well" or "somewhat well," the AP-GfK poll found.

Seven percent of those polled said someone in their household had tried to sign up for insurance through the exchanges—potentially 20 million people. But three-quarters of those who tried to sign up reported problems, the *Associated Press* reported.

Unlike the highly publicized problems dogging the federal [health](#) exchange website, many state-run exchanges have been operating relatively well, according to published reports.

The reason for the disparity: the sprawling federal website has been overwhelmed by visitors and—some experts contend—hampered by faulty design and software. The state-run sites, by comparison, are much smaller and nimbler, and technicians can react quickly to fix problems that arise, the *Times* reported.

"Individual state operations are more adaptable," Alan Weil, executive director of the National Academy for State Health Policy, an independent nonpartisan group, told the newspaper. "That does not mean that states get everything right. But they can respond more quickly to solve problems as they arise."

More information: Here's how to find [the health exchange serving your state](#).

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