

Insurance

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a state-based marketplace and it performed dismally. In, April, the Cover Oregon board voted to switch from an exclusively state-based marketplace, to a hybrid that includes the federal government. Note that customers who enrolled in a 2014 private plan through

Holm reminds that the site has been up year round processing special enrollment periods and changes in circumstances. She also notes those eligible for Oregon Health Plan can sign up for coverage any time throughout the year. Though Healthcare.gov made national

Customers who enrolled in a 2014 private plan through Cover Oregon, as well as anyone else who would like private coverage to begin Jan. 1, 2015, need to enroll in a 2015 plan by Dec. 15, 2014

Cover Oregon, as well as anyone else who would like private coverage to begin Jan. 1, 2015, need to enroll in a 2015 plan by Dec. 15, 2014. That switch means, come Nov. 15, instead of heading to the Cover Oregon site, Oregonians should head to the federal government run interface Healthcare.gov to shop for the plan that best fits their lifestyle. “Oregon is moving to a better way to enroll in health insurance,” says Cover Oregon spokesperson Ariane Holm. “It will be easier because people will be able to enroll in one sitting. “Based on what our federal partners at HealthCare.gov have shared with us, they are making good progress to ensure they’re ready for a successful second open enrollment.”

VA

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Eventually, McDonald would like all veterans to have one user name and password for all VA services. McDonald hopes to complete the reorganization within a year. Veterans also should be able to communicate with officials in a single region to solve problems, McDonald said. Under the current structure, a veteran may live in one VA region for health care, another region for mortgage services and a third for veterans’ benefits. The reorganization, to be known as “MyVA,” is designed to provide veterans with “a seamless, integrated and responsive customer service experience — whether they arrive at VA digitally, by phone or in person,” McDonald said. McDonald, a former CEO of consumer-goods giant Procter & Gamble, has been pushing to refocus the VA on customer service since taking over the troubled agency in July, following a scandal over long patient wait times for veterans seeking health care and widespread falsification of records by

A whistleblower reported that dozens of veterans may have died while awaiting treatment at the Phoenix VA hospital, and that appointment records were manipulated to hide the delays

VA employees and managers to cover up the delays. McDonald has been urging VA employees to refer to veterans as customers and to refer to him as “Bob,” rather than “Secretary.” He also has given out his cell phone number to reporters and veterans alike and urged them to call him with questions and suggestions. Some members of Congress have disputed the inspector general’s report on the Phoenix deaths and suggested that language casting doubt on the link between the delays and patient deaths was inserted at the suggestion of top VA officials in Washington. The IG’s office and the VA have denied that claim. Three high-ranking officials at the

Phoenix facility have been placed on leave while they appeal a department decision to fire them. Four other high-ranking executives around the country were targeted for removal, but only one was fired. Two officials retired and a third was granted an extension for more time to respond to the VA’s decision. The scandal led to the ouster of former VA Secretary Eric Shinseki and to a new law making it easier for veterans to get VA-paid care from local doctors. The law also shortens and streamlines the appeals process for employees who are fired. McDonald told the CBS News program “60 Minutes” on Sunday that the VA is con-

sidering disciplinary action against more than 1,000 employees. “We’re talking about people who violated our values,” he said. McDonald’s comment about 1,000 employees facing discipline is one of several numbers regarding employee discipline the VA secretary has offered in recent days. At a news conference last Thursday, McDonald said the VA has proposed disciplinary action — up to and including firing — against more than 40 employees nationwide since June. Those cases are all related to the wait-time scandal and manipulation of records to hide delays. At an appearance Friday at the National Press Club, McDonald said the VA has taken or is considering disciplinary action against 5,600 employees over the past year, although aides later clarified that most of those actions were not related to the health-care scandal. “We are very serious about making sure that we hold people accountable,” McDonald said.

Medicare

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plan gets a number of stars on a scale of 1 to 5—with 5 being the best—based on quality and performance. These ratings are designed to help people with Medicare, their families, and caregivers compare plans, in addition to information on their premiums and benefits. This year, people with Medicare who choose to enroll in a Medicare health or prescription drug plan will have access to more high-rated, four- and five-star plans than ever before. Approximately 60 percent of Medicare Advantage enrollees are in a Medicare Advantage Plan earning four or more stars in 2015, compared to an estimated 17 percent back in 2009. Likewise, about 53 percent of Part D enrollees are currently enrolled in stand-alone prescription drug plans with four or more stars for 2015, compared to just 16 percent in 2009. Since the

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passage of the Affordable Care Act, enrollment in Medicare Advantage will increase to 42 percent to an all-time high of over 16 million and Medicare Advantage premiums will have decreased by 6 percent. For people with Medicare, this is good news in how they receive care. Plans that are higher rated deliver a high-level of care, such as improving the coordination of care, managing diabetes or other chronic conditions more efficiently, screening for and preventing illnesses, making sure people get

much-needed prescription drugs, or getting appointments and care quickly. A high rating also means these plans give better customer service, with fewer complaints or long waits for care. If you have Medicare and need assistance, you can visit Medicare.gov, call 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227), or contact your State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP). You should have received the 2015 “Medicare & You” Handbook and

important notices from your current plan, Medicare, or Social Security about changes to your coverage. If you’re satisfied with your current coverage, there’s nothing you need to do. Better quality in Medicare health and prescription drug plans isn’t the only good news for people with Medicare. For most seniors who have Original Medicare, the 2015 Part B premium will stay unchanged for a second consecutive year at \$104.90. This means more of seniors’ retirement income and any increase in Social Security benefits will stay in their pockets. The Part B deductible will stay the same as well. Medicare is working hard to make sure this good news continues so that seniors and people with disabilities will continue to get the health care coverage they deserve.

Beauty and Race

The first fashion director at Vibe, Michaela Angela Davis; Mimi Thi Nguyen, associate professor at the University of Illinois and blogger at ThreadBared; and Patrice Grell Yursik, aka Afrobella (pictured at right) speak at the upcoming 11th annual Ray Warren Symposium at Lewis & Clark, Nov. 12-14; all events are free and open to the public. The event explores questions of race, beauty, and desire from a range of angles—the politics of black hair, hierarchies of skin color, cosmetic surgery practices to reduce characteristics associated with racial or ethnic groups, appropriation in the name of fashion, the interplay of racism and fatphobia, and the connections among race, beauty, and disability. Additional panels focus on topics including racism in the Pacific Northwest and American Indian fashion designers. For a complete schedule of events and speakers, visit <http://go.lclark.edu/warrensymp>.



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\$60 million in navigator grant monies to 90 organizations in states with federally and state-based marketplaces.

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