$3 MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2026 SYRACUSE.COM

THE POST-STANDARD

BUFFALO STRONG

THE BILLS ARE 2-0 AFTER A HIGH-SCORING WIN OVER THE LIONS. HERE'S WHAT'S FUELING BUFFALO'S FAST START — AND WHAT COULD STILL CAUSE CONCERN. **SPORTS, B1**

HEALTHCARE

It may become harder to get coverage for GLP-1 drugs

Adobe Stock

The difference between health plans that cover them and those that don't can mean hundreds of dollars a month.

Julie Z. Weil *Washington Post*

Weight-loss drugs are so popular and so expensive that they are the single largest contributor to a record-setting increase in the cost of employer-sponsored health insurance that is expected next year.

As the price for the drugs, including Wegovy and Zepbound, strains companies' budgets, more employers are pulling back from covering them on their health care plans.

PepsiCo recently stopped covering weight-loss medications for its employees other than diabetics.

The company sent employees a letter saying: "Prescription weight loss medications have become one of the fastest-growing costs in the PepsiCo Plans."

Health insurer Cigna stopped covering the drugs this summer for its own workers.

The employer organization Business Group on Health found in a survey that two-thirds of companies currently cover drugs for weight loss, but 10% plan to drop the coverage in 2027.

> "Among our clients, no one's questioning the efficacy of the medication. It's a game changer. It's balancing empathy with economics. And in the short term, there just is not a return on investment."
>
> **Caroline Susie, a dietitian at Marsh who advises companies on their benefits packages**

Matthew Rae, who analyzes employer-sponsored health insurance at the KFF policy organization, said U.S. law allows companies to choose whether to cover most medications on their insurance plans. But GLP-1s are somewhat unique. Usually, the drugs that employers choose not to cover are rare ones, not medications used by more than 1 in 10 American adults.

Because poorly treated diabetes is so expensive, most employers do cover GLP-1s for Type 2 diabetics, Rae said. "Once you have someone who's diabetic on your plan, you want to do everything you can to manage their diabetes, typically."

But many employers are stopping at diabetics and not covering weight-loss drugs for anyone else.

For people who rely on GLP-1s, the difference between an employer who covers the medications and one who doesn't can mean shelling out hundreds of dollars a month, even as direct-to-consumer costs have declined.

Ashley Defay, who works in human resources in Chicago, started taking a GLP-1 while working for a company that covered it. "It was helping me with my brain fog. It was helping me lose the weight that I just couldn't lose," she said.

But then she switched employers and was surprised to learn her new company didn't cover the drug.

She and her doctor sought coverage multiple times, noting that she was prediabetic and diagnosed with sleep apnea — two conditions treated by the medication. But her new insurance denied her requests.

She reluctantly went off the medication. She regained the weight she had lost. She then decided to pay on her own for a modified drug from a compounding pharmacy, at a cost of about $200 a month.

SEE HEALTH, A3

ALBANY

Judge: Plan to test weapons in Adirondacks should be denied

Unconventional Concepts Inc. has proposed testing 155mm howitzers within the Adirondack Park.

Samantha House *shouse@syracuse.com*

A company wants to test military-grade artillery weapons in the Adirondacks.

The company has proposed creating a howitzer testing range in Adirondack Park in the shadow of a mountain in the rustic town of Lewis, about 300 feet from Taylor Pond Wild Forest and 2.1 miles from Jay Mountain Wilderness, according to a project description from the Adirondack Park Agency.

If granted permission, Unconventional Concepts Inc. would test-fire steel projectiles from a portable 155mm howitzer into a targeted area, the APA said — noting the company hasn't proposed using any "explosive warheads."

The heavy artillery weapon is commonly used in modern warfare.

There are 44 homes within 2 miles of the proposed range, which is 10.8 miles from Lake Champlain.

But the howitzer testing project hit a considerable snag.

An administrative law judge for the state Department of Environmental Conservation has dismissed a hearing about the permit application to test howitzers.

In his 15-page ruling, Judge David Greenwood also returned Unconventional Concepts' project application to the Adirondack Park Agency with a suggestion.

"I recommend that the APA Board dismiss this proceeding for lack of prosecution and deny the Project Application," the judge wrote.

In his decision, Greenwood said Unconventional Concepts had failed to prove the howitzer testing project "meets the criteria for approval" by neglecting to address issues identified by APA's board, provide

SEE ADIRONDACKS, A3

DATA

School suspensions

School suspensions in half of the school districts in Onondaga County declined during the 2024-25 school year, according to state data. **A2**

POLL

AI concerns

A new poll finds Americans are growing concerned about the environmental impact of AI data centers and the resources needed to power them. **A6**

New York says millions may qualify for utility bill discounts

State says about 2.5M qualified households are not enrolled.

Renee Fox *rfox@syracuse.com*

Check before you pay your next utility bill: New York says some households can save up to $500 a year through its Energy Affordability Program, and millions of eligible residents have not enrolled.

The program provides monthly discounts on gas and electric bills, and state officials estimate about 2.5 million additional households could qualify for the savings but are not currently enrolled.

Nearly 1 million households already receive the discounts.

Gov. Kathy Hochul has launched a statewide effort to encourage more residents to sign up. "Right now, 2.5 million eligible New Yorkers are leaving money on the table."

The program, known as EAP, is designed to make energy bills more affordable. Discounts vary based on household income.

Some households are automatically enrolled because they already receive assistance through programs such as the Home Energy Assistance Program, known as HEAP, or Temporary Assistance.

Others may qualify but must apply on their own. The state says households enrolled in programs including SNAP food assistance, Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income, federal housing assistance, Head Start and certain veterans' benefits may be eligible for EAP discounts.

Eligibility also expanded this year to include many middle-income households.

For customers served by National Grid, annual household income limits now range from $69,477 for one person to $133,609 for a family of four. A household of six can qualify with income up to $176,364.

That means some households that would not traditionally qualify for utility assistance may now be eligible for monthly bill discounts.

New Yorkers can check eligibility and apply through the state's Energy Affordability Program website: dps.ny.gov/energy-affordability-program/.

Today's weather: Cloudy. **High:** 65. **Low:** 48. B10

0 96404 00006 7