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CLIMATE CHOICES WINTER WEATHERIZATION

BEATING THE COLD SPELL

Blasting heat at home and still freezing? Here are several easy fixes to save money and stay warm.



Snow covers homes during a winter storm Jan. 6, 2025, in Cincinnati, Ohio. ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE

HEALTH INSURANCE

Fewer buy Obamacare coverage as premiums are spiking

By Nada Hassanein
STATELINE.ORG

Nationwide, the number of people buying health plans on Obamacare insurance marketplaces is down by about 833,000 compared with a year ago, according to federal data released last week.

Many states are reporting fewer new enrollees, more people dropping their coverage, and more people choosing cheaper and less generous health insurance plans with higher deductibles.

Across most states, Thursday was the last day to enroll for plans that start in February. But nine states and Washington, D.C., have deadlines later this month, so the numbers could change.

There are 21 states with state-run health insurance marketplaces, and the rest use the federal website. The vast majority of states have seen declines in enrollment so far, compared with around this time last year.

Preliminary data released last week by the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services shows 22.8 million enrollees, down from a record total of 24.3 million last year.

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PA. BOARD OF PARDONS

Clemency advocates not in favor of pick to fill vacancy

By Danielle Ohl
SPOTLIGHT PA

HARRISBURG — Gov. Josh Shapiro's nomination to the Board of Pardons is a psychiatrist and attorney who has for decades acted as a hired expert witness in high-profile cases.

Shapiro nominated John S. O'Brien II to fill the vacancy left when psychiatrist John Williams' term expired in November. Two Republican-controlled state Senate committees will review O'Brien's nomination before the full chamber votes to approve or deny the appointment.

"The Shapiro administration is confident that Dr. John O'Brien II will serve the Board of Pardons well," said spokesperson Alex Peterson in an emailed statement.

A request for comment from O'Brien was not returned as of publication.

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By Caleigh Wells
ASSOCIATED PRESS

It's that time of year again, when the fuzzy socks are working overtime, the heat is cranking and somehow lots of homes are still freezing.

That's because a lot of that heat leaks out of the house — and the colder it is outside, the faster the warm, inside air leaks out. There are ways to stay warm and save on heating costs that can be achieved though, through a quick trip to the local hardware store, a \$100 investment and a free afternoon.

It'll come in handy in the summer too when the same problem recurs, except you lose precious cool air to the sweltering outdoors.

The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that air leakage accounts for more than a quarter of the energy used to heat or cool a typical home. Experts say you can make a meaningful difference even without expensive solutions like whole-house insulation or replacing ductwork.

"It'll lower your utility bills, it'll make your home more comfortable and reduce your energy use," said Johanna Neumann, senior director with the advocacy organization Environment



Claude Blocton shovels the snow in front of his home Jan. 2 in Oak Park, Mich.

THE DETROIT NEWS

America.

FINDING, PLUGGING THE LEAKS

Neumann said the first step to keep a home warm is finding the air leaks. The worst are detectable just by putting a hand up and feeling for a draft, say,

around the edge of a door.

Candles and incense are two effective and low-cost ways of finding air leaks. First, wait for a windy day and close all the windows and doors, Neumann said.

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HEALTH AND WELLNESS

At-home STD tests offer new options for screening and treatment

By Matthew Perrone
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — New options for testing and treating some of the most common sexually transmitted diseases are becoming available, a trend that experts hope will keep downward pressure on U.S. infection rates.

Last year, the Food and Drug Administration approved the first at-home test that can detect three common infections in women — gonorrhea, chlamydia and trichomoniasis — as well as the first home-based kit for the virus that causes cervical cancer.

The agency ended the year by approving two different drugs for gonorrhea, the first new options for the disease in decades.

It's positive news after cases of sexually transmitted infections reached alarming highs before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted screening, education and treatment for sexual health nationwide.

But the pandemic years also brought positive developments for testing. The same technology used for the first over-the-counter coronavirus tests is now being translated into home-based kits for syphilis and other sexually transmitted infections. Previously, the FDA had mostly limited the

use of such tests to health professionals.

"Sexual health can be stigmatized and people can be hesitant about testing," said Dr. Ina Park, a sexual health specialist at the University of California, San Francisco. "Now we have a lot of options for patients who may be wary of going into a provider's office."

NEW TESTS OFFER CONVENIENCE AND QUICKER TURNAROUND TIMES

Testing company Visby Medical launched its three-in-one test for women last year, following FDA approval in



Visby Medical's three-in-one gonorrhea, chlamydia and trichomoniasis test for women. VISBY MEDICAL VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

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