

FRIDAY ALERT



Alliance for Retired Americans

815 16th Street, NW, Fourth Floor • Washington, DC 20006 • 202.637.5399

www.retiredamericans.org

Spanish version: www.alianzadejubilados.org

December 14, 2018

Pharmaceutical Corporations Struggling to Preserve their Clout in the U.S. House

Current and former staffers and lobbyists connected to the drug industry say that pharmaceutical lobbyists are struggling to preserve their clout as Democrats prepare to take control of the House of Representatives in January.

According to [STAT](#), a media company focused on health, medicine, and scientific discovery, part of the explanation is some elected Democratic officials' high-profile pledges not to accept money from corporate PACs or the drug industry.

Due in large part to PhRMA's sheer size and the 160 lobbyists on its payroll, both opponents and allies have long described the group using phrases such as, "it's untouchable," "it never loses," and "it can kill a bill before the ink is dry on the first draft." Suddenly, however, the industry lobbying powerhouse looks a lot more vulnerable. One drug industry lobbyist told STAT that the industry will be counting on the Senate to kill any controversial legislation that makes its way through the House.

"Seniors look forward to many changes following last November's election results," said **Robert Roach, Jr.**, President of the Alliance. "High on that list is the possibility that prescription drug prices will stop skyrocketing and come back to earth. The Alliance will be pushing harder than ever to pass legislation that allows Medicare to negotiate prices with the drug industry."

For now, PhRMA remains one of the top three most powerful lobbying groups in the country, according to **James Thurber**, who founded American University's Center for Congressional and Presidential Studies. He did add that PhRMA is losing ground on drug pricing.

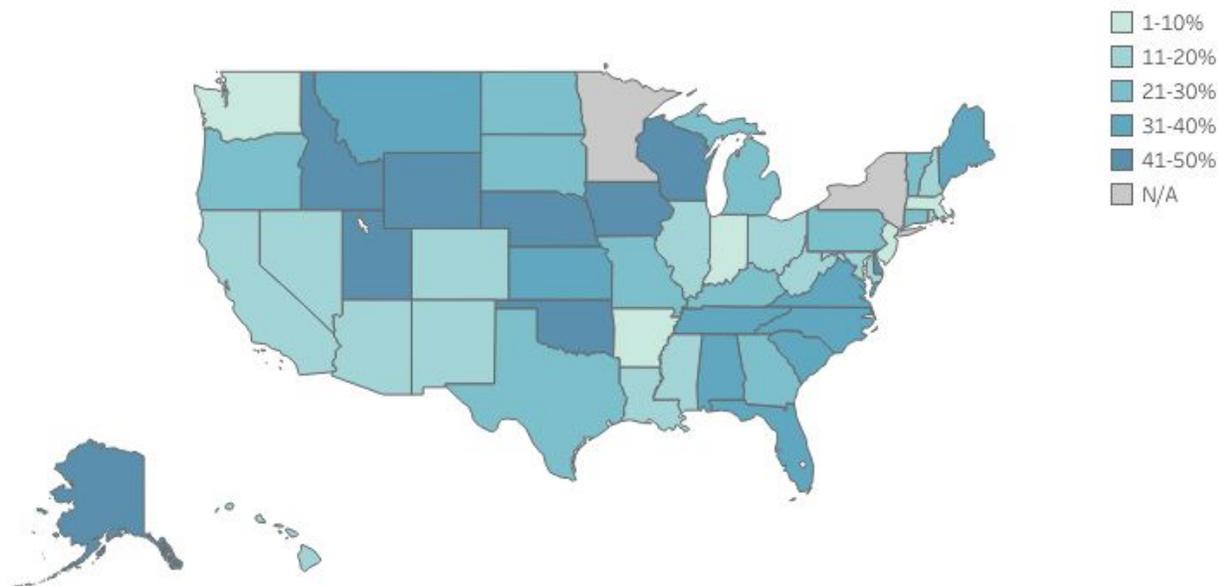
Study: 4.2 Million Uninsured are Eligible for Free Affordable Care Act Coverage

An analysis from the Kaiser Family Foundation, published Tuesday, finds that 4.2 million uninsured people are eligible for health coverage through the Affordable Care Act (ACA) at no cost to themselves.

The [study](#) finds that there are many eligible Americans who can have a plan for \$0 in premiums due to the financial assistance under the 2010 health care law. The subsidies are high enough to completely cover the cost of the least expensive ACA options, known as bronze plans. However, a lack of awareness could still be a major stumbling block in addressing the high number of

uninsured. December 15 is the deadline to sign up for 2019 plans in most states, and enrollment is currently running about 10 percent lower than last year.

Percent of Uninsured Potential Marketplace Shoppers who have Access to a Free Bronze Plan After Tax Credits in 2019



SOURCES: 2019 Premiums come from KFF analysis of premium data from Healthcare.gov and review of state rating filings. Data on population and eligibility for subsidies come from KFF analysis of the American Community Survey (ACS) for 2017.

NOTES: This analysis does not include individuals who are over the age of 65, or who are eligible for Medicaid in 2019 or are undocumented immigrants. DC is not included in this analysis due to an insufficient sample size in the ACS. New York and Minnesota are not included in this analysis because they offer Basic Health Plans to enrollees with incomes less than 200% of poverty.

Ironically, part of the reason that so many people are eligible for free coverage after financial assistance is that the current administration canceled key ACA payments last year. After insurers raised premiums in response to that move, the change had the unintended consequence of increasing financial assistance to many people, since the subsidies offered increase when premiums rise.

Despite the availability of free coverage, it could be a better deal for some people to pay more in premiums and purchase a more expensive silver plan, since those plans have significantly lower deductibles.

“The free plans can be a godsend, but it is still important to be careful when choosing any insurance plan,” warns **Joseph Peters, Jr.**, Secretary-Treasurer of the Alliance. “The administration recently expanded access to health insurance plans that do not comply with the ACA’s original regulations. Those plans may not cover 10 essential benefits like emergency services, mental health care and prescription drugs.”

Despite Predictions, Union Membership Isn’t Dropping Following Supreme Court’s Janus Decision

Many analysts had predicted that the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling in the case of *Janus v. AFSCME* would diminish union membership. But so far, many unions have actually [increased](#)

[their numbers since the verdict](#). This can partially be attributed to actions that states have taken to protect unions.



“This development is obviously good news, but we cannot be complacent,” said **Richard Fiesta**, Executive Director of the Alliance. “Conservative groups like the Koch Brothers are working feverishly to build on their Janus momentum in state legislatures in 2019 with laws to erode worker power.”

“Retirees are reminded to be more active than ever to make sure that the ramifications of the Janus decision are minimized,” Fiesta continued. “Our pensions, health benefits and economic security are at risk if corporations continue to trample over workers’ rights.”

He noted historic grassroots labor movements and teacher walkouts all across the nation in 2018 as playing a key role in the results that labor achieved. Fiesta urges continued organizing, holding elected leaders accountable, and fighting back against efforts to divide us and weaken our communities.

Depression in Seniors: Sometimes the Holidays are the Hardest

Many seniors are not able to follow their families from place to place during the holidays, a time traditionally filled with activities with family and friends, due to physical limitations or their financial situation. As a result, feelings of isolation are apt to increase during a period that is generally associated with joy and celebrations.

According to *U.S. News and World Report*, depression is common in older persons, with some estimates showing that [8 to 16 percent of older individuals experience clinically significant depressive symptoms](#).

Psychologists recommend calling older friends and relatives during the holidays to let them know you're thinking about them or, if possible, offering to visit. Human interaction, in addition to formal treatment approaches, can go a long way toward helping an older adult dealing with depression.

On the flip side, while loneliness is often thought of as a problem mainly affecting the elderly, another new study shows that seniors overall are [no more likely than other Americans](#) to report always or often feeling lonely or socially isolated.