

# January 2026

## Consumer Newsletter

Consumer Assistance News provides information, tips, and updates to help people understand health coverage and healthcare options.



It's January, and we're doing our best to avoid the slippery roads and unpredictable weather! Now that the busy holiday season has ended and a new year has begun, we hope you'll have a moment to cozy up with a hot drink and read this month's edition. We're discussing topics including Blood Donor Month, an exciting award, some technology insight, and a few ways to help keep yourself and others warm through the rest of the winter.



National Blood Donor month is the perfect time to become a donor, even if it's your first time. Mainers who have never donated blood might be surprised to learn just how easy it is, and how much it can help! In a recent interview about the need for blood donations in the state, a spokesperson from [American Red Cross](#) shared that just one blood donation can save up to three lives! Mainers can enter their zip code in the [Find a Drive tool](#) to schedule a time to donate blood or platelets.



Each year, national health advocacy organization [Families USA](#) selects advocates who best represent the fight for equal access to high quality, affordable health care. This year, Consumers for Affordable Health Care's Executive Director, [Ann Woloson](#), has been chosen to receive the award! Ann, along with 3 other winners, will be celebrated at the Advocates of the Year Luncheon, taking place on January 23rd at the [Health Action Conference](#) in Washington DC. Congratulations, Ann!



This winter kicked off with extreme low temperatures and plenty of snow, sleet, and wind. For Mainers who work outside, live outside, or have limited access to warm indoor spaces, being exposed to cold temperatures and winter weather can have serious health risks. Here are some ways to help keep our neighbors warm and safe this winter.

- The Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) helps qualified homeowners and renters pay for heating costs. Learn more about HEAP and apply for assistance [here](#).
- Not all Mainers have the clothes and outerwear they need to stay warm and dry. Even basics like hats and dry socks can help a lot. You can help Mainers stay warmer this winter by donating your clean, gently used items to [Maine Needs](#). They

have already given over 712k clothing items to Mainers who need them! You can donate your items [here](#).

- Warming centers are indoor spaces which welcome anyone who needs to get warm when it's too cold to be outside. Mainers with limited access to warm indoor spaces may not know where to find a nearby warming center, but you can help. Learn where to find [warming centers in your county](#) so you can share this information with anyone who needs it.

### Ask the Expert: Can I trust AI health coverage advice?



#### Ask the Expert: Should I ask ChatGPT health care and coverage questions?

**Short answer:** No! AI (Artificial Intelligence) and chatbots might seem like they have all the answers, but they can't compare to a human who has been trained to provide expert information about health coverage options. If your question is more complicated than finding a phone number or address, call our free HelpLine at 1-800-965-7476 to get answers and help from a human.

**The details:** These days it seems like our phones can help us do almost anything! From getting groceries to rides, some apps really do make life easier. For busy Mainers, asking an AI chatbot questions about health care or coverage may seem helpful at first, but you can't trust the answers it gives! AI chatbots like ChatGPT use **all** of the information online, including old, out of date, opinion-based, biased, and false details to create an answer to questions. AI chatbots can't tell you whether you're eligible for MaineCare, how much you will pay for Marketplace coverage, or help you find a provider in your network, so don't waste time asking. Call our free HelpLine at 1-800-965-7476 instead.

### Health Coverage Term of the Month

## SPECIAL ENROLLMENT PERIOD (SEP)

The deadline to enroll in Marketplace health coverage for 2026 was January 15th. Mainers who missed this deadline may be eligible to enroll in a Marketplace plan during a short amount of time called a "special enrollment period." To be eligible, Mainers must have had a recent "qualifying life event," including things like getting married, being pregnant, having a baby, adopting, or turning 26. Other life changes like moving or losing coverage from a job may also qualify someone for a [special enrollment period](#). Interested in learning more? Call our free HelpLine at 1-800-965-7476.

### Have Questions About MaineCare Changes?



Wondering how MaineCare changes will impact you in 2026? Don't panic. MaineCare changes are coming, but most changes won't start until the end of the year. Mainers can apply for MaineCare anytime at [My Maine Connection](#). If you have questions about MaineCare coverage or are wondering if you are eligible for MaineCare, call our [HelpLine](#) at 1-800-965-7476.

### Have Questions? We Can Help!



Call our free HelpLine 1-800-965-7476

View this email [online](#).