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Home Depot cutting coverage for 20,000 as Obamacare looms



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The Home Depot Inc. will end medical coverage for some 20,000 part-time employees, sending them instead to government exchanges, **Bloomberg** [reported Thursday](#).

The Atlanta-based home improvement retailer is just the latest company to cut benefits before Obamacare exchanges are set to open Oct. 1.

Home Depot (NYSE: HD) employees who work 30 hours or fewer a week will no longer be offered limited liability medical coverage, Home Depot spokesman [Stephen Holmes](#) said. The Affordable Care Act defines part-time workers as those who work 30 hours or fewer per week.

Holmes also said about 5 percent of Home Depot's 340,000 employees are enrolled in the current plan.

"The new marketplaces will provide them more options," he said.

Earlier this week, drugstore Walgreens said it [will send its workers to a private health insurance exchange](#) with money to buy their own plans.

In August, Atlanta-based [United Parcel Service Inc.](#) said it [will drop about 15,000 spouses from its medical plan](#) beginning Jan. 1, citing Obamacare. And Atlanta-based Delta Air Lines Inc. (NYSE: DAL) warned Obamacare [will cost it \\$100 million in 2014](#).

Earlier Thursday, U.S. Senate Majority Leader [Harry Reid](#) [vowed any bill to defund Obamacare is 'dead' in Senate](#). House Republicans plan to vote on legislation that would link funding the federal government beyond Sept. 30 with defunding implementation of health care reform. That bill won't pass the Senate, Reid said, and even if it did, President [Barack Obama](#) would veto it.

Meanwhile, as the Oct. 1 launch of the exchanges approaches, Holmes said Home Depot is helping its employees choose a health plan with several initiatives, including a call center and online resources to provide guidance.

"We're told we're one of only a handful of companies taking these steps," he said.

[Kirk Wilson](#), president and CEO of KMBHealthcare of Alpharetta, said he expects more businesses to use Obamacare to justify reducing the number of employees they offer health coverage.

"A number of large businesses have been sending part-time workers out of their health plans for several years," he said. "That's nothing new. What is new is they're attributing it to the Affordable Care Act. It's providing an outlet for them."

Wilson said lower-income employees sent to exchanges might be better off than if they had remained in their company's health plan because they will qualify for subsidies under Obamacare.

Dave Williams covers Government