

What is premium alignment?

Preserving affordability for Washington residents

Changes in the federal health insurance landscape have massive implications on Washington state residents. At the state level, we're discussing how to ensure Washingtonians retain their health insurance.

One way to do that is by increasing the cost of Silver plans, also known as premium alignment (and previously, Silver loading), to help offset the loss of federal enhanced premium tax credits (ePTC; set to expire at the end of 2025). Increasing Silver plan costs increases the amount of premium tax credits available to Washington Healthplanfinder customers. According to a 2020 analysis by Axene Health Partners, raising the cost of Silver plans would increase available premium tax credits by up to **\$110 million annually**.

Effect on customers

During a time when **affordability remains the primary barrier** to more Washingtonians being insured and getting access to care, increasing the cost of Silver premiums helps the Exchange drive costs down and provide more Washingtonians access to critical premium tax credits.

In 2026, with premium alignment:

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Silver plan premiums will increase

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Federal tax credits that help eligible customers lower their monthly net premiums will increase

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Carriers' Silver plan premiums will be more expensive than Gold plan premiums

Most Exchange customers will benefit from premium alignment because their tax credits will go up significantly, even though Silver premiums will also increase.

Federally subsidized customers can use the extra premium tax credits to offset the increase in Silver plans or to buy a cheaper Gold or Bronze plan. More than \$100 million extra premium tax credits will be available for those who qualify, helping at least 64% of customers. This will help reduce the cost of their Silver plan, or they may choose to buy a lower-premium Gold plan with more comprehensive coverage. Customers who do not receive federal tax credits may also benefit from the increase. **Customers not eligible for federal tax credits** can enroll in a less expensive Gold or Bronze plan. Ultimately, bringing in more premium tax credits benefits all Exchange customers, even if they aren't accessing tax credits.

Washington isn't alone in adopting premium alignment.

Seven states — Maryland, Pennsylvania, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, Vermont and Illinois — have adopted a version of premium alignment.

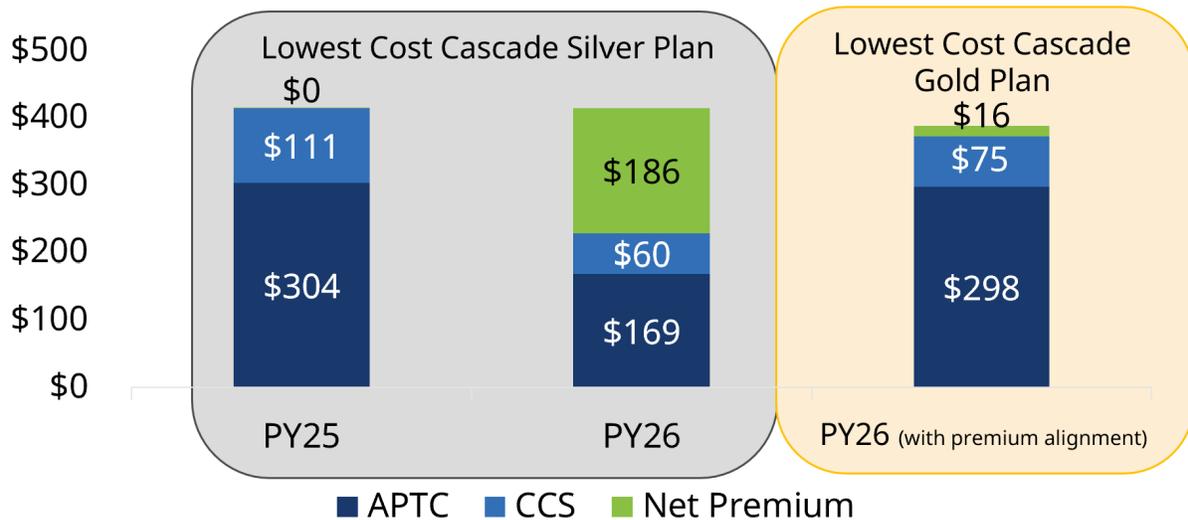
<p>In Texas, marketplace enrollment grew by 31% in open enrollment the first year of premium alignment (plan year 2023). Enrollees in Gold plans increased from 9% to 23%.</p>	<p>In New Mexico, the proportion of marketplace enrollees receiving high-deductible insurance (in Bronze or low-AV Silver) fell from 49% to 23%.</p>	<p>In Pennsylvania, the average lowest-cost Bronze premium decreased by 9% and the average lowest-cost Gold premium decreased by 12%.</p>
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Washington State Office of the Insurance Commissioner enacted an emergency rule in March 2025 to preserve customer affordability and stability in Washington Healthplanfinder by introducing premium alignment practices in our state. These will be in effect starting plan year 2026.

For these efforts to be successful, the Exchange, and those assisting customers, need to support enrollment into the highest value, lowest-cost plans. Tools the Exchange is using to enact this change include plan mapping, enhancing the customer decision support tool, adjusting plan display and updating the Cascade Care Savings policy.

Illustrative customer example

Gabriella, 40, lives in Seattle with an annual income of \$38,000 (250% of the federal poverty level). Currently, advance premium tax credits (APTC) and Cascade Care Savings (CCS) combine to result in a \$0 net premium. Without premium alignment, Gabriella's net premium in a Cascade Silver plan will be \$186 in 2026, with reduced PTC and Cascade Care Savings. With premium alignment, a Gold plan is the highest-value, lowest-cost plan available to her. Her net premium in her carrier's Cascade Vital Gold plan in 2026 is \$16, as the amount of APTC she receives will increase.



For more information about how the Exchange is enacting this change, read the [Emergency Rule: Plan Year 2026 development of uniform cost-sharing reduction factor](#).