Will it be easier for me to get coverage even if I have health problems?
Insurers will be barred from rejecting applicants based on health status once the Exchanges/Marketplaces are operating in 2014.

How does the legislation affect seniors?
The law is narrowing a gap in the Medicare Part D prescription drug plan known as the “doughnut hole.” That’s when seniors who have paid a certain initial amount in prescription costs have to pay for all of their drug costs until they spend a total of $4,700 for the year. Then the plan coverage begins again.

That coverage gap will be closed entirely by 2020. Seniors will still be responsible for 25 percent of their prescription drug costs.

The law also expanded Medicare’s coverage of preventive services, such as screenings for colon, prostate and breast cancer, which are now generally free to beneficiaries. Medicare will also pay for an annual wellness visit to the doctor.

Are there more changes ahead for the law?
Some observers think there could be pressure in Congress to make some changes to the law as a larger package to reduce the deficit. Among those options is scaling back the subsidies that help low-income Americans buy health insurance coverage. The amount of the subsidies, and possibly the Medicaid expansion as well, could be reduced.

It’s also possible that some of the taxes on the health care industry, which help pay for the new benefits in the health law, could be rolled back.

The Independent Payment Advisory Board (IPAB), one of the most contentious provisions of the health law, is also under continued attack by lawmakers. IPAB is a 15-member panel charged with making recommendations to reduce Medicare spending if the amount the government spends grows beyond a target rate. If Congress chooses not to accept the recommendations, lawmakers must pass alternative cuts of the same size.

Health care reform, specifically the Affordable Care Act (ACA)*, consists of a multitude of provisions that will change health insurance for many Americans.

*As ACA is still very new, parts of it may be subject to ongoing interpretation and revision.

Watch for Issue 4 of In a Nutshell – with more information for you about ACA.