

 News Release

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## Tax Time Guide: Online Tools Help Taxpayers

### Choose a Qualified Tax Preparer

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WASHINGTON — The Internal Revenue Service today reminded taxpayers of options available to them on IRS.gov to get information and tips about selecting qualified tax professionals.

This is the third in a series of 10 daily IRS tips called the Tax Time Guide. These tips are designed to help taxpayers navigate common tax issues as the April 15 deadline approaches.

Taxpayers can use the [IRS.gov/chooseataxpro](http://IRS.gov/chooseataxpro) website that includes a list of consumer tips for selecting a tax professional. There is also a [gateway page](#) with links to national non-profit tax professional groups, which can help provide additional information for taxpayers seeking the right type of qualified help.

“The tax return represents one of the biggest financial transactions of the year for many Americans, whether they are getting a refund or paying a tax bill,” IRS Commissioner John Koskinen said. “Filling out tax returns accurately is critically important. Between tax law changes and tax scams circulating, it’s more important than ever for people who need professional assistance to select wisely and carefully.”

More than half of the 150 million individual returns filed last year were prepared with the help of a paid return preparer.

For the current filing season, some taxpayers may want to get help with the new provisions of the Affordable Care Act, and tax professionals provide one of several options available. The vast majority of people will only have to check a box on their federal income tax return to indicate they had health coverage, but others have Marketplace coverage with tax credits, have exemptions or need them, or may have to make a payment because they could afford to buy health insurance but chose not to. Tax professionals will be able to help guide taxpayers through what they need to do in these circumstances. Commercial software programs will also be able to help.

There are some basic tips taxpayers can keep in mind when [selecting a tax professional](#). They include:

- Select an ethical preparer. Taxpayers entrust some of their most vital personal data with the person preparing their tax return, including income, investments and Social Security numbers.
- Make sure the preparer signs the return and includes their Preparer Tax Identification Number (PTIN). All paid preparers are required to have a valid PTIN.
- Review the tax return and ask questions before signing. Taxpayers are legally responsible for what's on their tax return, regardless of whether someone else prepared it.
- Never sign a blank tax return. This is a clear red flag when a taxpayer is asked to sign a blank tax return. The preparer can put anything they want on the return – even their own bank account number for the tax refund.

The [IRS.gov/chooseataxpro](https://www.irs.gov/chooseataxpro) site also features a [partner](#) page that provides links to the web sites of national organizations of tax professionals, with additional details about the groups, including state and local organizations or representatives.

Earlier this year the IRS launched a Directory of Federal Tax Return Preparers with Credentials and Select Qualifications on the IRS website to help taxpayers verify credentials and qualifications of tax professionals. The Directory is a searchable, sortable database with the name, city, state and zip code of credentialed return preparers as well as those who have completed the requirements for the new IRS [Annual Filing Season Program](#) (AFSP), which includes having a valid 2015 Preparer Tax Identification Number (PTIN).

In 2010, the IRS launched the Tax Return Preparer Initiative that requires anyone who prepares any federal tax return for compensation to obtain a PTIN from the IRS. In 2014, the IRS issued about 677,000 PTINs. Currently, anyone with a valid PTIN can prepare and sign federal tax returns they prepare.

For more information, see:

- [IRS Tax Pro Associations Partners](#)
- [What are the red flags? IRS tips for choosing a tax preparer.](#)
- [When, and how, do I file a complaint about a tax preparer?](#)

Other tips in the Tax Time Guide series are available on IRS.gov.