

# Tips for Handling Medical Debt

Many individuals struggle to pay medical bills even when they have health insurance. In fact, the White House states that medical debt is the largest source of debt in collections.

The Kaiser Family Foundation estimates that **100 million adults**—about 4 in 10—have medical or dental debt. Many expect repaying their debt to take years; approximately **1 in 5** people say they do not expect to ever pay it all off.

Medical debt strains millions of Americans each year. Consider these tips for avoiding medical debt:



**Stay healthy.** Choosing a healthy lifestyle can help you avoid visits to doctors and specialists. Stay healthy by exercising daily, eating healthy, reducing stress and regularly visiting your doctor. Preventive care can help reduce the cost and number of future medical claims.



**Understand your health plan.** Health plans may not cover all services or treatments. Understanding your health insurance can help you avoid costly mistakes and being denied coverage.



**Compare prices.** Prices for in-network and out-of-network care differ, so be sure to confirm the care you receive is in-network. It can be helpful to research billing codes to verify correct billing and insurance coverage—and always negotiate for lower prices.



**Advocate for yourself.** Ask about prices and keep your own records. Obtain preapproval in writing before you receive treatment. If your insurance denies coverage, appeal this result.



**Get financial assistance.** Many hospitals offer financial services if you can't pay your medical bills. Before you obtain treatment, ask your provider if they offer any assistance.

Although your best bet is to engage health care providers early before it goes to collections, there are still some ways you can deal with medical debt. Consider the following steps:



**Verify.** Ask for an itemized bill and review it for accuracy, checking for duplicate billing, unauthorized charges and errors. If you don't understand your bill, ask questions.



**Dispute.** If you find errors on your bill, you can dispute the collections or contact your health care or insurance provider to discuss further.

Many Americans struggle with medical bills, but these strategies could help you avoid or reduce medical debt. Check with HR for additional resources.