

Transitioning to Adulthood: Understanding Health Insurance

Health insurance coverage can feel hard to learn. Knowing your options can help you make better choices for your health and your future. You may get insurance through the government, a job, or your parents. It helps to know how it works.

Types of Health Insurance

- Public (provided by the government)
- Private (offered through jobs or bought individually)

Public Health Insurance

Public health insurance helps people who cannot afford private plans. These programs depend on your age, income, and life situation.

Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)

CHIP helps kids and teens get low-cost health care. CHIP is for families who earn too much for other programs but cannot afford a private plan. Each state runs its own CHIP program, and the name may be different where you live. CHIP covers:

- Free well-child doctor visits
- Free dental checkups
- Low-cost vision care

You may also be covered for premiums (Monthly payments).

Medicaid

Medicaid gives free or low-cost health care to people with low income. Medicaid covers:

- Doctor visits
- Hospital stays
- Mental health care
- Some rides to medical visits

Those who qualify for Medicaid:

- Teens living on their own.
- Pregnant teens.
- People under 18 whose parents qualify.
- Low-income adults under 65.
- Former foster care youth (you may already have coverage).

If you were in foster care, talk with your social worker or guardian about Medicaid benefits.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

If you have a disability and receive SSI benefits, you may already have Medicaid. Check with your local social security office.

Private Health Insurance

Private insurance usually comes from your job or a family member's job. There are different plans offered based on the employer. If your job offers insurance, you must enroll to get it. Some people also buy it on their own. Private insurance often is taken from a job's paycheck, called a premium.

Affordable Care Act (ACA)

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) was passed to make health insurance more affordable.

It helps:

- Stay on your parent's insurance until age 26.
- Cover free preventive care (vaccines, check-ups, screenings).
- Avoid being denied coverage for pre-existing conditions.

Steps to Get Health Insurance

To see if you qualify for public insurance, visit <https://www.healthcare.gov/>. The site lets you compare plans and costs so you can choose what fits your needs and budget.

If you do not qualify for public insurance, check if your job offers health insurance. Each employer decides what plans they offer, what they cover, and how much they cost. Some jobs also require you to work a certain number of hours or stay at the job for a set time before you can enroll. If you qualify, you must enroll through your job to get coverage.

You may also be able to stay on a parent's plan until you turn 26. Some people need their own plan before age 26 if their parent's coverage changes. Check with your insurance provider to learn about your options.

Common Insurance Terms

- **Co-payment:** A fixed amount (like \$15) paid for a health care service. Usually done at the time of service.
- **Durable medical equipment (DME):** Medical equipment and supplies doctors order for daily or long-term use. This can include:
 - Wheelchairs
 - Crutches
 - Oxygen
 - Blood sugar test strips
- **Deductible:** The amount you pay out-of-pocket before insurance starts to pay.
- **Premium:** The amount paid each month or year to keep health insurance.

For a full list of health insurance terms, please visit:

<https://www.cms.gov/ccio/resources/files/downloads/dwnlds/uniform-glossary-final.pdf>.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 3/2026 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#8502