

The Colette Louise Tisdahl Foundation

Frequently Asked Questions: Financial Assistance for Medical Bills



The Colette Louise Tisdahl Foundation ([website](#)) has a mission to improve outcomes of pregnancy, childbirth, and prematurity, as well as lessen the impact of loss through financial assistance, education, and advocacy. We provide financial assistance for burial, cremation, doula and support services, transportation, childcare, phone bills, extended stay assistance, just to name a few. If you need financial assistance with medical bills, your hospital may be able to help. This sheet was created to answer the frequently asked questions regarding financial assistance.

Does my hospital offer financial assistance?

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (the "ACA") requires all §501(c)(3)-qualified non-profit hospitals to have a financial assistance policy (a "FAP") for emergency and other medically necessary care provided. Although for-profit hospitals are not legally required to have a FAP, some nonetheless offer assistance. Financial assistance for patients of non-profit and for-profit hospitals are addressed separately below.

Non-Profit Hospitals

This section covers non-profit hospitals' financial assistance obligations under the ACA. Search this directory to determine if your hospital is a non-profit: <https://www.ahd.com/>.

Am I eligible for financial assistance?

Eligibility depends on your hospital's unique criteria. Free or reduced care is typically available to families with an annual income and/or assets below a threshold, and in some cases there are several need-based discount tiers. Review your hospital's FAP to determine if your financial circumstances qualify for assistance.

How much aid am I eligible to receive?

The amount of assistance available varies based on your hospital's FAP and your individual financial circumstances. Though your hospital may be more or less generous, the American Hospital Association's guidelines recommend hospitals provide free care to patients with incomes below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level ("FPL") and reduced care to uninsured patients with incomes between 100% and 200% of the FPL. Calculate your income as a percentage of the FPL here: [My Coverage Plan](#).

Is my bill reasonable?

Under the ACA, hospitals may not bill an individual qualified for financial assistance more for than it bills privately-insured and Medicare-covered patients for the same care. To determine if the amount billed is reasonable, compare against the average costs reported at: [Fair Health Consumer](#). In addition, always confirm the charges billed match the care provided.

You may be billed separately for care from a third-party physician contracted by the hospital. In general, these charges are subject to the same cost limitations as the hospital's bill unless the FAP states otherwise.

Where can I find my hospital's FAP and Application?

Hospitals must post their FAP, a "plain language" summary FAP and the financial assistance application form on their website (typically under the "Billing" section) and make paper copies available by mail and in the admissions area and emergency room.

To obtain the FAP, summary FAP and application, ask the hospital admissions desk or billing administrator the following:

"Please provide a copy of the hospital's financial assistance policy, the summary financial assistance policy and the application form for financial assistance. If there are other assistance programs that I may be eligible for, please provide any relevant materials."

Translations may also be available if your hospital is located in a multi-lingual community.

How do I apply?

The application form will contain instructions for completing and submitting the application. Applicants are generally required to submit evidence of their eligibility for aid (i.e., demonstrating that your annual income and/or assets fall below the applicable thresholds). Typically, such evidence may include tax returns, pay stubs or documentation establishing qualification for state means-tested programs. Be advised that your hospital can only request the information listed on the application form (and no other information), and cannot inquire as to your immigration status.

Is there a deadline to apply?

Yes. By law, you have at least 240 days from your first post-discharge billing statement to submit an application for financial assistance. However, after 120 days the hospital may initiate extraordinary collection actions unless the patient has filed an application for assistance. Therefore, we recommend submitting the application within 120 days to postpone any extraordinary collection actions until the hospital determines if you qualify for aid. If you apply for financial assistance after such collection actions have begun, then such collection actions will be paused until a decision is made on your application.

Refunds

If you have already paid all or a portion of your bill, you may still file an application for financial assistance. If assistance is awarded, then you will receive a refund.

Who do I contact with questions about the FAP or financial assistance application?

The summary FAP and your billing statement will provide contact information and the location of hospital staff that can assist with questions about the FAP and application process. It may also identify non-profit organizations that are able to assist. Some hospital have financial assistance counselors, and we encourage you to meet with them.

If my application is denied, can I appeal?

Many hospitals allow appeals to a supervising individual or body within the hospital, although you are not entitled to an appeal under the ACA. While your appeal is pending, your hospital must pause extraordinary collection actions.

What actions can the hospital take against me if I fail to timely pay my bill?

Hospitals may take basic collection actions against you if you have an unpaid bill, such as telephone calls, late notices and the like. However, certain extraordinary collection actions are prohibited unless and until the hospital has used reasonable

efforts to determine if you are eligible for financial assistance. Such extraordinary actions include (i) placing liens on your assets, (ii) initiating a lawsuit and (iii) reporting your debt to a credit reporting agency. The hospital cannot sell your debt to a third party debt collection agency unless the collection agency abides by the same restrictions applicable to the hospital.

During the 120 day period after your first post-discharge bill, the hospital must notify you about its FAP and application process. After that 120 day window lapses (and assuming such notification is made), the hospital can initiate extraordinary collection actions. If during the 240 day period after your first post-discharge bill you submit an application for financial assistance, the hospital may not initiate or continue any extraordinary collection actions until they determine whether you are eligible for assistance. After such 240 day window lapses, the hospital may pursue collection actions without restriction.

For-Profit Hospitals

Is my hospital legally required to provide financial assistance?

Under the ACA, no. But it is worthwhile to ask the hospital whether it provides financial assistance on its own initiative.

Other Sources of Assistance

Whether your hospital is for-profit or non-profit, we recommend researching whether assistance is available from any of the following state, charitable and other programs.

- **State-Based and Charitable Programs.** Your state and certain charities may offer additional means of assistance. Contact a financial assistance counselor or social worker at your hospital, your state's department of health services or your state's hospital association for more information. The following questionnaire will identify assistance programs that you may qualify for: [Benefit Finder](#).
- **Medicaid.** Apply for your state's Medicaid program. Eligibility is based on income and assets, with relaxed requirements for pregnant women in some states. For information about the application process, see: [Medicaid](#).
- **Payment Plans.** Some hospitals offer installment payment plans to defer a portion of the cost.
- **Loans.** Some hospitals partner with local banks to offer short-term loans.
- **Negotiate a Discount.** Some hospitals are willing to negotiate discounts, particularly if you make a down payment on a portion of your bill.

To learn more about the Foundation, visit our [website](#).