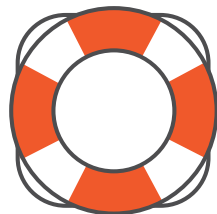




# Tips for How to Deal with Medical Debt

If you are unsure how to pay your medical bills, you are not alone. Medical debt is one of the most common reasons for debt collections in the United States. One in six Americans have past-due healthcare bills on their credit report.



## *HAAM is here to help!*

If you are confused or stressed about medical bills, HAAM can help you understand your options and advocate on your behalf.

**Call us: 512-541-HAAM ext. 208 or  
Email us: [support@myhaam.org](mailto:support@myhaam.org)**

## What to do about medical bills:

### Remain calm.

While bills can be overwhelming, you have more options than you think. The sooner you act, the more time you have to negotiate, file appeals and avoid collections. Whatever you do, don't ignore it!

### Verify it.

Medical statements can be very confusing. Make sure you:

- Verify you have a bill, not an explanation of benefits
- Double check whether insurance will pay and was billed properly
- Agree that you actually used all of the services listed
- File appeals quickly if you find an error - usually you have 30-60 days

### Negotiate it.

Medical bills have much more room to negotiate than many other types of debt, even after they are in collections. Ask for a lower settlement amount and/or a no-fee payment plan.

### Finance it.

Many providers offer low-rate medical lines of credit. Like any credit decision, be sure to read the fine print. If you can't pay the debt off in the specified payment period, you may be hit with extra charges.

### Know your rights!

- If you received a surprise out-of-network bill from an emergency room or a hospital you thought was in-network, you may be the victim of "balance billing." For services received on or after January 1, 2020, Texas now bans this practice for state-regulated insurance plans, which include most plans offered on the marketplace. Call your health plan to report the bill!
- If a collections agency is harassing you, you can request that they stop contacting you about the debt, though it won't make the debt go away.
- Never give a provider or debt collector direct access to your bank account.
- In extreme cases, filing for bankruptcy is a legal option for eliminating medical debt completely. Consult with a lawyer.

# Tips to avoid medical debt:



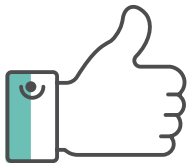
## Get the right insurance.

Not having the right insurance for your needs is a major reason for medical debt. HAAM will guide you to the best options and might even be able to help with premium payments!



## Understand your coverage.

Take the time to understand how your plan works to take full advantage of your benefits (like free preventative care). Know your deductibles and copayment amounts ahead of time so you can plan for expenses and avoid surprises.



## Be proactive.

Ask your doctor to refer you to in-network bloodwork, MRIs and other tests. Call ahead for any major procedures to check your coverage and costs with your provider and insurance plan. When the situation is not an emergency, ask if you will be charged a “facility fee” and go to your regular doctor or an in-network walk-in clinic for minor issues instead.



## Plan/save for costs.

If you have a high-deductible health plan, be sure to take advantage of the tax-free health savings account available to you. Even a small savings account of \$250-\$800 helps. Most medical debt in collections is \$600 or less.



## Take steps to improve your overall health,

like exercising and stopping smoking. While major events like accidents are one-time expensive events, chronic conditions, like high blood pressure and diabetes, actually drive the majority of healthcare spending. Check out HAAM’s wellness program for additional resources.



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