



Financial Assistance & Debt Crisis Intervention

Patient Advocate Foundation
700 Thimble Shoals Blvd.
Suite 200
Newport News, VA 23606
(800) 532-5274
EMAIL: info@patientadvocate.org
INTERNET: www.patientadvocate.org

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Editor's Note

This is the second in a series of brochures developed by the Patient Advocate Foundation, Inc. The information herein is in response to frequently asked questions (FAQ's) by patients. The brochure is intended to provide general but informative responses to these inquiries. Any incident, inquiry or issue may vary according to these specific facts and circumstances relating to the individual.



Dear Friend,

Thank you for contacting the Patient Advocate Foundation. We are a national, non-profit organization that serves as a liaison between the patient and his/her insurer, employer, and/or creditor to resolve matters relative to their diagnosis. We do not provide direct financial assistance to patients; rather, our objective is to provide guidance to patients who are attempting to navigate through their financial problems and to provide information about opportunities for financial assistance that are available locally, regionally, and nationally.

Through research conducted by our Patient Services Department, we have identified resources that we feel may be helpful to you. When applying for financial assistance, please recognize that many organizations have specific criteria that needs to be met in order to qualify for financial assistance and that some organizations may have assistance in an area that you do not need. Be creative in your approach in how to utilize this assistance. For example, you may need financial assistance to pay your health insurance premium, and an organization will provide assistance for your utility bill. Take advantage of the financial assistance for the utility bill and reallocate your money to pay your health insurance premium, if the program permits reallocation.

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In general, most organizations will not provide financial assistance for secured debt, such as a mortgage or an automobile. Your best option for this type of debt would be to work direct with the creditor and ask for alternative payment arrangements for the loan, such as refinancing, deferring payments, or paying only the interest due. If you cannot get the creditor to work with you, you may consider selling the item. A home mortgage is usually at risk of foreclosure after three months of delinquency. Typically, mortgage lenders are more cooperative when they are approached before a mortgage reaches foreclosure.

Strategies for resolving your Debt Resulting from Illness

While global telephone numbers are provided below, it is important for to review the enclosed materials for exact service descriptions, additional telephone numbers, and specific contact instructions as referenced in the Financial Resources Guide.

Do you own your home? Or have a mortgage?

Call the bank or mortgage holder early and try to work out payment arrangements. Consider selling, taking a second mortgage, taking a reverse mortgage or establishing an equity line of credit.

Do you rent?

Apply for Section 8 housing (a voucher/certificate that helps you pay your rent), Public Housing, or consider moving to a residence with less rent.

Do you need food?

Apply for food stamps, the WIC (Women, Infant and Children's), utilize a food bank, or check with area churches for assistance.

Do you need help with your utilities?

Check to see if your state has a Low Income Heating Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). Ask the utility company if they have any charity programs available. Call the Department of Social Services in your area to see if they have any information about a Community Action Agency, an organization who can usually assist when a shutoff or eviction notice is given. Ask your doctor to write a letter of medical necessity to the utility company, as they may be more willing to work with you relative to your condition. Lastly, you may contact the State Utilities Commissioner to request their review of a compassionate appeal.

Have you been declared disabled by a doctor and you do not have health insurance?

If so, you should apply for Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) or Social Security Income (SSI) and Medicaid. Once you apply for SSDI or SSI, there is generally a waiting period of several months before you would receive your benefits. Check with your Social Security Office to determine what benefits you would qualify for and the length of your waiting period. The national number for the Social Security Administration is **(800) 772-1213**. After you have been disabled for 24 months, you may qualify for Medicare. The Medicare national phone number is **(800) 633-4227**.

Are you on Short-Term Disability through your employer?

If so, investigate with your employer if you qualify for Long-Term Disability. If you are offered COBRA for continuation of your health insurance, you should make every effort to maintain that coverage. This will allow you the opportunity to establish health insurance under a new plan without a lapse in coverage and will reduce the possibility of you being held to a pre-existing condition clause.

Once your Short-Term Disability has ended, if you do not have Long-Term Disability, you are

unable to return to work, and a doctor has declared you disabled, you should apply for SSDI. You should also apply for Medicaid if you did not have the option of continuing your health insurance coverage. As stated above, when you apply for SSDI or Medicaid, there is generally a waiting period of several months before you would receive your benefits. Check with your Social Security Office to determine what benefits you qualify for and the length of your waiting period.

Do you have outstanding medical bills?

Ask your provider of care to allow you to apply for Charity Care or Indigent Care. If you do not qualify, ask to make payment arrangements that you can afford. If you cannot establish reasonable payment arrangements, contact **Consumer Credit Counseling Services** for assistance. Call [\(800\) 493-2222](tel:8004932222) or [\(800\) 388-2227](tel:8003882227) to locate an office near you.

Do you have credit card debt?

Contact the creditor to make payment arrangements, offering to pay a minimal payment that you can afford. Be specific in the amount. If you are unable to establish payment arrangements, contact Consumer Credit Counseling Services at the numbers listed above for assistance.

Do you have life insurance policies with equity?

Consider using an organization that loans money against whole-life policies, which reduces the payout amount at the time of death. Term-life policies cannot be used for this purpose. One organization, **LifeWise**, can be reached at [\(800\) 219-7385](tel:8002197385).

Do you need healthcare and you do not have health insurance?

Check with your State Insurance Commissioner in the capital of your state to determine if your state has a Risk Pool. Ask your provider of care for Charity Care or Indigent Care. Consider using a Hill-Burton

hospital. These facilities provide care to uninsured Americans. To locate a hospital in your area, call **(800) 638-0742**.

Do you need medication? Are you are uninsured or without prescription samples?

Check with your state to see if they operate a prescription drug program. Apply for the Medicine Program or have your doctor apply for the Indigent Drug Program through the drug manufacturer. Call the **Pharmaceutical Manufacturers' Association (PHRMA)** at **(800) 762-4636** and ask for the patient helpline to get further information on this program.

Enclosed you will find all of the resources that you will need to contact all of the organizations and programs listed above, including copies from our publication, "The National Financial Resource Guide for Patients." Remember to take advantage of the resources within your community, like area churches, Social Services Organizations, the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, and the United Way. You might consider coordinating a fundraiser. Lastly, look for ways to cut your living expenses. If you need further assistance, do not hesitate to contact us through our toll-free number, **(800) 532-5274**. Again, we thank you for contacting the Patient Advocate Foundation and we wish you success in your endeavor to maintain financial solvency during this difficult time.

Sincerely,
The Members of the Patient Services Department

Patient Advocate Foundation Mission Statement

The Patient Advocate Foundation is a national, non-profit organization that serves as an active liaison between the patient and their insurer, employer, and/or creditors to resolve insurance, job retention, and/or debt crisis matters relative to their diagnosis through case managers and attorneys. Patient Advocate Foundation seeks to safeguard patients through effective mediation assuring access to care, maintenance of employment and preservation of their financial stability.

Patient Advocate Foundation Publications

- **The Managed Care Answer Guide**
(available in English & Spanish)
- **The Patient Pal** (available in English & Spanish)
- **Your Guide to the Appeals Process**
- **First My Illness...Now Job
Discrimination: Steps to Resolution**
- **The National Financial Resource Guide
for Patients: A State-by-State Directory**
- **Chelsey's Story: One Patient's Search to
Solve Insurance Problems Including a
Legislative Visit to Washington**

If you would like further information about any of these publications, please contact our office.