

Washington DC Strategies to Prevent Medical Debt

Balance Billing and Short-Term Insurance

The federal No Surprises Act (NSA) protects patients from surprise medical bills (also referred to as “balance bills”), which are unexpected costs from out-of-network providers. Under the federal legislation, patients receiving emergency care or who are unknowingly treated by out-of-network providers during an in-network procedure are only required to pay the in-network cost-sharing amount for services provided. Effective January 1, 2022, the No Surprises Act applies to most health plans but not all care sites and services. States can legislate additional protections for balance bills not covered under the NSA, such as for ground ambulances, or limit the number of short-term, limited duration health plans available in the state, which traditionally cover fewer services putting enrollees at greater risk of incurring balance bills. Strategies examine in this section include:

- Prohibitions on Balance Billing for Ground Ambulance Services

- Prohibitions on Short-Term, Limited Duration Health Plans

Charity Care and Community Benefit Requirements

This section reviews state laws aimed at preventing medical debt, including mandates for hospitals and health care providers to offer financial assistance policies, screen patients for insurance and charity care eligibility, and inform patients of charity care policies before collecting payment. Strategies examined in this section include:

- Mandated Hospital Charity Care

- Hospital Charity Care Screening Requirements

- Hospital Charity Care Notification Requirements

- Hospital Community Benefit Reporting Requirements

Reducing Financial Consequences

This section examines how a state regulates providers’ ability to collect medical debt once it has been incurred. States can mitigate the financial harm of medical debt by regulating how and when providers and collection agencies pursue repayment or by limited aggressive collection actions. Strategies examined in this section include:

- Mandated Waiting Period Prior to Sending a Bill to Collections

- Limits on Liens or Foreclosures due to Medical Debt

- Limits on Wage Garnishment due to Medical Debt

- Limits on the Amount of Interest Charged to Medical Debt



Medical Debt Prevention

Balance Billing and Short-Term Insurance

Policy	Status as of June 2025	Summary
Prohibits Balance Billing for Ground Ambulance Services	 Does not prohibit balance billing for out-of-network ground ambulance services	
Prohibits Short-Term, Limited Duration Health Plans	 State law has eliminated short-term, limited duration health plans	STLD health plans aren't explicitly banned in the District, but strict regulations have effectively removed them from the market.



State Has Active Policy or Program



Policy or Program Partially Implemented



State Does Not Have an Active Policy or Program



No Source, or Limited Information Found

Medical Debt Prevention

Charity Care and Community Benefit

Policy	Status as of June 2025	Summary
Mandated Hospital Charity Care	State law requires hospitals to provide free or discounted care to low-income patients and sets standards for eligibility (see notes)	Health care facilities in D.C. that are subject to a Certificate of Need must provide charity care equal to at least 3% of their annual operating costs to District residents.
Hospital Charity Care Screening Requirements	State does not require health care providers to screen patients for Medicaid, Marketplace, or charity care eligibility before collecting payment*	
Hospital Charity Care Notification Requirement	State does not require health care providers to notify patients of charity care options before collecting payment*	
Hospital Community Benefit Reporting Requirement	State law requires hospitals to annually report the amount of charity care provided	Health care facilities subject to a Certificate of Need are required to report annual levels of uncompensated care (including charity care, bad debt, and other community benefits) to the State Health Planning and Development Agency (SHPDA).

State Has Active Policy or Program

Policy or Program Partially Implemented

State Does Not Have an Active Policy or Program

No Source, or Limited Information Found

Medical Debt Prevention

Reducing Financial Consequences

Policy	Status as of June 2025	Summary
Mandates Waiting Prior to Collections	✗ State law does not require a waiting period before sending medical debts to collections	
Limits on Liens or Foreclosures due to Medical Debt	● State law prohibits initiating a lien or foreclosure to collect medical debt	The District of Columbia has established an unlimited homestead exemption that protects residents' primary homes from seizure for any type of debt, including medical debt.
Limits Wage Garnishment due to Medical Debt	● State law exceeds federal wage garnishment protections for residents with medical debt	State consumer protections against wage garnishment exceed federal protections.
Limits on the Amount of Interest Charged to Medical Debt	✗ The state has not enacted a law to limit interest rates for medical debt	

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