Health Insurance Information for Parents

A note from Student Health Services’ Executive Director Dr. Deborah Beck

The health and wellness of your student while away at school is fundamental to the success of their higher education experience. Even if your student has medical insurance coverage, the USC-sponsored Student Health Insurance Plan may still be a good choice for your student and your family.

We can help you decide what health insurance decision is best for your child. The rising costs of health insurance continue to dominate headlines. It is more important than ever for parents of college students to research, compare and select a plan that best keeps their child healthy and in school.

Some employers are using high deductibles, exclusions or higher premiums to add family members as a method of cost containment. The result is many individuals, including students, find themselves with inferior coverage and looking for a way to pay for necessary health care.

Here are several reasons why parents should consider the USC-sponsored Student Health Insurance Plan:

1. **Health Benefits** – Every student’s health and wellness are critical components to academic success. Students with insurance stay healthier by using recommended preventive care services that help avoid health issues and often detect medical issues that need attention. The university-sponsored Student Health Insurance Plan provides 100 percent coverage for preventive care with in-network providers. The primary purpose of student health insurance is to keep students healthy and in school so they can graduate and realize their life and career goals.

2. **Cost Benefits** – The USC-sponsored Student Health Insurance Plan provides benefits that are more affordable than comparable plans on the open Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act market. The USC-sponsored plan has the added benefit of being coordinated with our on-campus Student Health Services. USC’s plan is usually less expensive because of the favorable demographic of college students’ age and overall good health. We have significantly lower deductibles, thus reducing your out-of-pocket expenses. In some cases, parents will find that purchasing the university plan is less expensive than adding their child to their coverage – especially compared to a high deductible plan or a plan that doesn’t include in-network providers close to campus. The premiums parents pay for dependent coverage on their plan are often higher than the monthly costs of the university plan.

3. **National Network of Providers** – The university plan includes a national network of health care providers and pharmacies, providing coverage regardless of the distance from campus or home. Our comprehensive on-campus Student Health Services is a leading part of this network of providers.

4. **Plan Tailored for Students** – USC has customized its Student Health Insurance Plan to best meet the needs of our students. They are provided coverage for a wide range of services, such as doctor office visits, preventive care, prescription drugs, accidental injury, hospitalization, outpatient surgery and diagnostic benefits. Because this plan is tailored for students, it is designed from the start to work hand-in-hand with our on-campus health center.

sa.sc.edu/shs/insurance
The advantages of our Student Health Insurance Plan make it an affordable, quality alternative to more expensive, traditional plans. Promoting optimal student health from admission to graduation enhances student success. Over the past two decades, student health issues have grown more complex. Students may come to college with a range of health care needs from minor to extensive. Student health insurance plays a critical role in optimizing student health.

Those who are uninsured have a higher chance of dealing with more severe illnesses due to the lack of affordable health care. Since unexpected sickness is one of the leading factors for family debt, student health insurance should be seen as an essential investment. One of the many benefits of purchasing health insurance plans for students is that they are offered at affordable prices and are designed to fulfill the needs of each student’s situation. The USC-sponsored Student Health Insurance Plan is set up to fulfill the majority of conditions. Although there may be the option to stay on a parents’ health insurance, the university plan may save you money in the long run and offer a great amount of flexibility.

A parents’ insurance plan may have very specific limitations on where the student can be treated and by whom. It may not be easy to find a healthcare provider in our area if you are coming from far away. In the case of any type of emergency, having the flexibility of our student plan opens up the network of providers and lifts this potential burden. With the cost of family plans on the rise, paying for a separate college student health insurance plan may be a wiser choice than continuing to pay more to stay on a parents’ plan.

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Making an Informed Decision

Please consider your coverage options carefully. While your current health insurance plan may provide adequate benefits close to home, restrictions may limit coverage for students outside your local area. Your plan may have a high deductible which may present a financial barrier to receiving care or result in high unexpected out-of-pocket costs.

It is important to explore all options and choose the one that is the most cost effective for you and your student. Take into consideration both premium cost and out-of-pocket costs when comparing plans offered through the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act marketplace.

Here are some aspects of the USC-sponsored Student Health Insurance Plan to consider:

- Comprehensive coverage with lower deductibles, copayments, out-of-pocket maximums and premiums
- Coverage meets the individual mandate requirement of minimum essential coverage
- The plan wraps around our on-campus Student Health Services to provide the best access to primary and preventive health care and mental health services
- Marketplace coverage is typically only applicable to the state in which the student is a resident, requiring participants to receive non-emergency care within their preferred provider network, typically a regional network
- The plan offers access to an expansive preferred provider network – with a robust national network
- Travel assistance coverage guarantees coverage during semester breaks, summer vacation and even while traveling or studying abroad
- Financial aid may be used to purchase the Student Health Insurance Plan for eligible students
- For low-income students living in states that have not expanded Medicaid, the Student Health Insurance Plan will likely prove to be the most cost-efficient option
- The plan is not subject to community-rating requirements; therefore, premiums are based on the actual claims experience of college students as opposed to the general population
- The plan costs $2,020 per year and will be added to the tuition bill, unless a waiver is approved.
5 Ways to Save with the USC-sponsored Student Health Insurance Plan*

1. Choose your providers wisely
To ensure the lowest out-of-pocket costs, start your care at Student Health Services on campus. We offer robust health, mental health and wellness services on campus with little or no cost-sharing. Once you have a treatment plan with Student Health Services (or primary care provider if you do not access Student Health Services), double-check that the doctors/facilities are in your plan’s network. Visit the Student Health Insurance Plan website at studentinsurance.com to search for in-network providers.

2. Avoid non-urgent use of the Emergency Department
While the Emergency Department is appropriate for true emergencies, using our on-campus Student Health Services for non-emergencies will result in lower out-of-pocket costs and appropriate level of care.

3. Choose generic drugs
Using a generic drug vs. a brand-name drug can save you money. Ask your doctor if a generic drug is available – and have your prescription filled at our on-campus Student Health Services full-service pharmacy.

4. Read your insurance-related mail and email notices
The insurance company may need additional information before processing a claim for you. The process of payment cannot continue until you respond, and if ignored, may lead to a claim denial. If you are unsure of what to do with information you get in the mail, call Consolidated Health Plans (CHP), the university’s Student Health Insurance Plan provider at 877-657-5030.

5. Take advantage of extras
Vision discounts, dental discounts, travel assistance and other wellness discounts may be available to save you money on services not covered under your insurance plan. Visit the student health insurance website at studentinsurance.com for more information.

*Source: Arthur J. Gallagher & Co., gallagherstudent.com

What Kind of Insurance Do You Have?

Prior to deciding to waive enrollment in the Student Health Insurance Plan offered by USC, there are important things you should know about limitations that may exist with the employer-based or other health insurance plan in which your child is currently enrolled.

Once the waiver period has closed, there will be no further opportunity to enroll in the USC-sponsored Student Health Insurance Plan without a qualifying life event for the remainder of the academic year. Please review your options carefully prior to making a decision to waive enrollment.

1. My employer-based plan has a high annual deductible.
   - As many employers move toward high-deductible plans, it is recommended that you review the benefits offered by the USC-sponsored Student Health Insurance Plan.
   - In many cases, the annual premium of the Student Health Insurance Plan is less than the individual deductible under an employer’s plan.
   - Our Student Health Insurance Plan features low deductibles and more first-dollar coverage, making them an economical choice compared to meeting a high individual deductible.

2. I have an HMO Plan based in our home state, which is not the state of South Carolina where my student is attending college.
   - HMO plans outside of the state of South Carolina will very likely not have access to providers in this state.
   - HMO plans require referrals made by primary care physicians to seek service by a specialist. Often times, the primary care physician will not make a referral without seeing the patient first. This can result in delaying care due to the student having to travel home, miss class and incur expenses in order to receive the necessary referral. In many cases, this results in delaying necessary treatment.
   - HMO plans will frequently only allow access to emergency care while in another state. This emergency care does not include any preventive care services, services for diagnostic, lab, X-ray, mental health services and other important services.
I have purchased an insurance plan through Healthcare.gov or through my home state’s insurance marketplace.

- The majority of plans available through Healthcare.gov or your home state’s insurance marketplace are limited-network HMOs, which carry the same restrictions and challenges as outlined in the HMO section.
- State marketplace plans can only be purchased in the state in which you are a permanent resident, meaning a student attending college outside their home state will not be able to purchase insurance plans through the marketplace in the state in which they attend school.
- Though subsidies are available through state marketplaces, they are based on household income. This means that if your student is still considered a dependent for your tax purposes, the parent’s income will be used when determining eligibility for subsidies.

I am enrolled in a Medicaid Plan in my home state which is not the state of South Carolina.

- Certain states like New York and California assign Medicaid based on county of residence.
- Medicaid plans are run by each individual state (or county) and do not currently offer any reciprocity to other states.
- Students attending school outside of their home state who are on a Medicaid plan based in their home state will only have access to emergency care. Emergency care does not include any preventive care services, services for diagnostic, lab, X-ray, mental health services and other important services.
- Dependents on a parent or guardian’s Medicaid plan are generally terminated from coverage on their 19th birthday, unless the child meets Medicaid eligibility on their own.
- Similar to marketplace subsidies, eligibility for Medicaid is based on household income. This means that if your student is still considered a dependent for your tax purposes, the parent’s income will be used when determining eligibility for Medicaid.

I am enrolled in a Medicaid Plan in the state of South Carolina.

- For students attending college in the same state in which they are a resident, Medicaid may be an option for you.
- Not all providers accept Medicaid payments for service. Finding a Medicaid provider accepting new patients can be a challenge.
- If you will be in a different part of South Carolina when you attend school, you may have to travel significant distance to receive care through your primary care physician and any specialists you may be referred to.
- Becoming established with a new primary care physician may take some time. We recommend that you take care of this prior to leaving for school so that you can receive necessary medical care with minimal delays once your classes begin.
- Dependents on a parent or guardian’s Medicaid plan are generally terminated from coverage on their 19th birthday, unless the child meets Medicaid eligibility on their own.
- Similar to marketplace subsidies, eligibility for Medicaid is based on household income. This means that if your student is still considered a dependent for your tax purposes, the parent’s income will be used when determining eligibility for Medicaid.

Prior to completing the waiver form, we recommend contacting your insurance provider to let them know where your child will be attending college.

Carefully compare all options to determine if your plan offers comparable coverage to the USC-sponsored Student Health Insurance Plan.

For more information about USC’s Student Health Insurance Plan, please contact Consolidated Health Plans, USC’s Student Health Insurance Plan provider, at 877-657-5030, or visit their website at studentinsurance.com.