Choosing Health Insurance that Meets Your Needs and Your Budget

By Jose Lamas, Community Program Associate

The time for signing up for health insurance has arrived. Open enrollment periods are under way or about to begin, meaning you will have some decisions to make. First, consider the level of coverage you want for you and your family, and compare prices. The amount of the premium is only one factor. If you’ll need medical services or prescription drugs there are other costs, too.

Next, think about out-of-pocket costs. If you pay a lower premium, it’s likely you will have higher out-of-pocket costs. This is just one reason why it’s a good idea to make a spending and savings plan centered on your health care costs, including the cost of your insurance.

Here are some examples of costs associated with your health plan:

**Premium:** This is the amount you need to pay, usually each month, for health insurance coverage.

**Deductible:** You will be responsible for paying a certain amount of your health care costs before your plan begins to cover these costs. For example, you might have to pay the first $500 for doctor visits before your insurance pays.

**Co-Pay:** This is a fixed amount you have to pay each time you receive treatment from a doctor or purchase prescription drugs.

**Co-Insurance:** This is a percentage you pay for each service after you have met the deductible. For example, a coinsurance level of 20 percent means that the plan pays 80 percent of the costs, while you pay the remaining 20 percent.

**Annual Out-of-Pocket Maximum:** This is the highest amount of health care costs you will have to pay yourself; it’s the limit on what you’ll have to pay in a year. For example, if your policy has a maximum of $5,000, your policy will pay all medical expenses for the rest of the year after you have paid $5,000 in co-payments and co-insurance.

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Get more information on health insurance and managing your health care costs on these websites:

- **Frequently Asked Questions** — MNSure, Minnesota’s online insurance marketplace: [https://www.mnsure.org/individual-family/faq/index.jsp](https://www.mnsure.org/individual-family/faq/index.jsp).
- **Health Insurance** — University of Minnesota Extension: [http://z.umn.edu/10bu](http://z.umn.edu/10bu).

### Making the Most of Parent-Teacher Conferences

**By Kathleen A. Olson, Program Director, Partnering for School Success**

A few times each school year, teachers and parents meet to discuss how to help students do their best in school. Here are some tips for getting the most benefit from parent-teacher conferences:

- If possible, plan for both parents to attend.
- Arrive on time.
- If needed, arrange for an interpreter ahead of time. Do not ask your child to interpret.
- If you can't meet during regular conference hours, request another time.
- The best conferences are those where teachers and parents work together for one purpose: to help your child do well.

Parents can prepare for the conference ahead of time by thinking about ways to help their children learn and succeed in school. Consider the following ideas:

- Ask each of your children: How is school going? What is your best subject? Why do you like it? What is your least favorite subject? Why? Is there anything you'd like me to discuss with your teachers?
- Make sure your children don’t worry about the conference. Help them understand that you and their teacher(s) are meeting to help them.
- Write notes about each of your children’s life at home, including notes about personality, any problems, habits, and hobbies or interests you feel are important for teachers to know. Inform teachers of any situations that may affect your children’s learning, such as illness or family problems.
- Write down questions about your children’s progress in school and any concerns you have about the school's programs or policies.
- Ask teachers how you and the school can work together to help your children.
- If language is a barrier for your children, ask what help is available, such as a cultural liaison, translated documents, website translations, and so on.

Set up additional times and ways to connect with the teachers, as needed, to discuss your children’s progress. Building strong parent-teacher partnerships helps your children get the best education possible.

### Some Things You Should Know Before Canceling a Credit Card

**By Gabriela Burk, Community Program Specialist**

Before closing any credit card account, call the issuing bank (or other lending institution) to verify that the balance on the card is zero. Not paying off the entire balance before canceling the card could negatively affect your credit report. Note that canceling a card will not eliminate the information from your credit report.

Some credit cards let you accumulate rewards of some kind, such as frequent flyer miles on airlines or points you can use to buy things at certain stores. Remember to collect (use) any rewards from your card before canceling it.

Call the bank to ask any questions you might have about the cancellation process. Finally, put your request to cancel your card in a letter, make a copy, and then mail the letter to the issuing bank. Ask the bank if you have any questions about what should go in the letter.

Smart Shopping for the Holidays

By Maria Francisca Mendoza, Community Program Assistant

The holiday season is almost here. Having a plan on how to manage your spending will help you save money, keep you out of debt, and reduce stress. Setting a limit per person will help prevent spending too much on gifts. Here are a few more ways to keep your holiday budget on track:

- Purchase items early and on sale.
- Give homemade gifts or written promises (IOUs) to do a personal favor or simply spend time with someone.
- Shop with a list of three to five options per person and pick one gift for each person.
- Take advantage of retail store coupons to maximize savings.
- Consider giving gift cards – they are always welcome.
- Use common sense when shopping for the holidays; you can please your loved ones without going over your budget.

Get Your Home Ready for Winter

By Antonio Alba Meraz, Extension Educator

Properly maintaining your home helps you prevent costly damage, reduce insurance costs, and eliminate health risks. Home maintenance is necessary all year round, but it's especially important in the fall so your home is ready for tough Minnesota winters. Here are some tips for ensuring your home withstands cold during winter:

- Set the thermostat to at least 55-60 degrees; this is warm enough to prevent pipes freezing, while also saving money on heating bills.
- Replace your furnace air filters according to the manufacturer’s instructions.
- Test your smoke and carbon monoxide detectors monthly. If you don't have detectors, install them immediately. Fires are especially dangerous in the winter.
- Check for frozen pipes by monitoring water pressure and drainage. Remember, pipes will not freeze if they are regularly used.
- Keep sidewalks and driveways free of ice and snow. Pour salt on icy patches.
- You should always repair broken glass in windows and doors promptly, but this is especially important in winter to keep cold winds from blowing into your home.

For more information on home maintenance during winter and year-round, visit our Extension web page *Keep Your Home Warm and Safe During the Winter* at [http://z.umn.edu/ymb](http://z.umn.edu/ymb).

Did You Know...

If you don’t take precautions when outdoors in extremely cold temperatures, you may suffer from frostbite or hypothermia. Frostbite means frozen body tissue, and it most often affects your body’s extremities, such as ears, fingers, or toes. Hypothermia means having an abnormally low body temperature, and it can cause sleepiness and confusion. Both frostbite and hypothermia require immediate medical attention. For more information, visit Extension’s *Staying Safe this Winter* website at [http://z.umn.edu/10bv](http://z.umn.edu/10bv).
What Did Participants Learn?

RentWise is a free workshop that helps participants become successful renters. The class includes information on topics such as properly caring for an apartment or rental home, establishing positive relationships with a property manager and neighbors, managing money, and using community resources to find affordable housing. Workshops are available in Spanish and English.

Here’s what participants said they learned after attending a RentWise workshop in Marshall:

“I learned how to manage income and expenses.”

“When I wanted to contact the landlord I was calling only. Now I will make a note.”

“I learned that if something is a little bit broken or damaged you can solve it yourself. If there is a big problem you would contact the landlord.”

If you are interested in attending a RentWise workshop, please contact Jose Lamas at 507-295-5316 or lamas006@umn.edu. You may also learn more about RentWise workshops for Latino families at http://www.extension.umn.edu/family/personal-finance/rentwise/latino-training/.