



CHARITY CARE IN WASHINGTON STATE

*Patients need to know they can get help.
This means real notice, in a real way.*

SB 5231 & HB 1359

Quick Facts

- Patients with low incomes have a right to free or reduced-cost hospital care, known as Charity Care
- Information about Charity Care is difficult to find in languages other than English
- Patients who should have received free or reduced-cost care are instead billed and sent to collections, resulting in crippling debt

Charity Care is a legal right, but access is routinely denied

- Patients have a right to free hospital care if their individual income is at or below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level of \$12,060/yr or \$24,600 for a family of four (2017 FPL).
- Patients between 100% and 200% of FPL have a right to discounted care.
- Hospitals have a duty to screen patients to determine if they qualify for Charity Care before any collection efforts.
- **Current notification practices leave many patients unaware that financial help is available.**

Most eligible patients do not receive Charity Care

- 522,000 (7.3%) of Washingtonians lack healthcare insurance. Most of them would qualify for Charity Care, yet in 2014, Charity Care accounted for only 1.8% of hospital charges as a percentage of total revenues.
- Instead of providing Charity Care, hospitals send bills to collections, leading to tens of millions in medical debt among those least able to pay.
- **Information about Charity Care in languages other than English is difficult to find, which does not reflect Washington's diverse patient needs.**

Find research, education, and analysis at
www.columbialegal.org/fair-access-to-hospital-care

Mr. Ramirez:

Mr. Ramirez went to the emergency room with chest pain that required an operation for a lung infection. While he was in recovery, hospital staff repeatedly asked how he planned to pay. Mr. Ramirez is a Spanish-speaker and told the staff person, through an interpreter, that he did not know how he could pay. Hospital staff did not inform him about charity care.

After leaving the hospital, Mr. Ramirez learned about charity care from a friend who told him he could get a "form" to apply. The hospital initially denied his request for an application. When he did finally receive one, it was in English.

Mr. Ramirez was desperately in need of help, but instead faced a difficult process, made harder, not easier, by the hospital.

Contact

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