



Protect Low-Income Washingtonians Who Need Hospital Care

All Washingtonians, regardless of income, should have access to affordable hospital care.

The cost of medical services, especially during emergencies, shouldn't prohibit people from seeking needed hospital care. Thankfully, Washington law requires that hospitals provide affordable emergency hospital care to people with low incomes—known as **charity care**.

Yet low-income uninsured and underinsured emergency room patients are too often **not informed** about their right to charity care. Sometimes they are **outright denied this coverage**. Instead, patients become debtors when the hospital sends the medical bills to collections or garnishes patients' wages.

Barriers to obtaining charity care are magnified for people whose dominant language is not English. Many never learn about or understand that they have a right to free or reduced care, and instead **face financial devastation** caused by hospital charges they do not owe.

*We must strengthen Washington's charity care laws, because when families and workers receive the necessary hospital care they need, **we all benefit from healthier communities today and dollars saved on essential medical care in the future.***

A bill before the state legislature would:

- Improve notification of the availability of charity care so that people seeking hospital care would know they may be eligible;
- Enhance hospital screening procedures so that eligible patients are offered free or reduced care;
- Ensure that language is not a barrier to obtaining needed care; and
- Require hospitals to make it easier for people who are already qualified for other safety net programs to qualify for charity care.

