

LICKING CALCUTTA - RILEY'S RANTS



Welcome to Unemployment, and oh, by the way, you no longer have health coverage.

Are you wondering why the 2009 Stimulus Package has health care items included? It is because the soaring unemployment rate has increased the number of suddenly uninsured, and the government is attempting to help. The stimulus package that President Obama recently signed into law will offer at least some temporary relief. One aspect that has become somewhat easier and slightly less expensive is the health coverage from 1986 called COBRA.

If you have children, Congress has passed legislation adding millions of children to those eligible for CHIP (Children's Health Insurance Program) which covers children in families that earn too much to qualify for Medicaid and too little to afford private health care insurance.

COBRA can work and may be your best option. If you have been working for a company with over twenty employees and they have provided health benefits, you are allowed to keep those benefits for up to 18 months.

This use to be a really cost prohibitive process and employees had to pay 102% of the health care premium. The new stimulus package temporarily changes the rules.

If you lost your job after 1 September 2008 and your family income is less than \$250,000 a year (\$125,000 for individuals), you will have to pay only 35 percent of the premium for the first nine months. The government picks up the rest. Take advantage of this if it is available.

If you qualify for the subsidized Cobra benefit, you can also switch into a lower-cost health plan, like an health maintenance organization (HMO), if your former employer offers one, even if you were signed up for a more expensive plan while you were working. That should help your unemployment money to stretch a little more.

Cobra is also beneficial for anyone that has a pre-existing condition. If you have a health concern and the rest of your family is considered healthy, you could stay on COBRA as an individual and then purchase private insurance for the rest of your family. This is another place to check the 10,000+ insurance plans available at eHealthInsurance.com. It is a fairly simple process where you will enter your sex, zip code and date of birth and the site will tell you which plans are available in your area. Many plans have comments / reviews from customers and as an added bonus, you can sign up online. (No, I don't get any referral money for sharing that information.)

That's great, Riley, but what about my children? This may be the place to look at private insurance for your children or perhaps the CHIP program. Investigate keeping you and your spouse on COBRA and evaluating the Government plans, which typically have higher income allowances for children than for adults.

Are you unable to fall into the COBRA or CHIP plans? Start searching around for private coverage. A good place to start comparison shopping is eHealthInsurance. Will you find something that is exactly what you want, maybe. Is it better than nothing? Hopefully. Again, the benefit of having health insurance is great, but the detriment is how to pay for it. Unemployment benefits (and often underemployment wages) rarely cover all your expenses and adding health care into the mix will certainly tap you out quickly.

Low income? You may qualify for government-sponsored health insurance, or services, if your total household income is coming from unemployment insurance, if you are a single parent, or if you lost your job because your company moved out of the country. Wow, seeing those all clumped together really strikes a chord. I recognize friends from everyone of those categories. If you are in any of those groups, or just want to check and see what you might qualify for, go to the Foundation for Health Coverage Education and take the five question quiz on the home page to see what services you might be eligible for. You can also contact them via their toll free number at 800.234.1317 which is open 24-hours per day.

Do you have some tips or information that would help people find health coverage? Please share them in the comments or let me know.

Links:

<http://ehealthinsurance.com/> Over 10,000 plans to choose from

<http://www.familiesusa.org/> The Voice for Health Care Consumers

<http://www.familiesusa.org/assets/pdfs/getting-covered.pdf> Families USA - Excellent Guide to Health Care Coverage. PDF format and 12-pages but worth reading.

http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog_post/chip/ CHIP Information

<http://cms.hhs.gov/> Medicaid US Government Site

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medicaid> Medicaid Information on Wiki

http://www.dol.gov/ebsa/faqs/faq_consumer_cobra.HT ML COBRA Information

<http://www.coverageforall.org/pdf/SCHIPMap.pdf>. Foundation for Health Coverage Education - Map in PDF format

<http://www.coverageforall.org/> Foundation for Health Coverage Education

<http://www.oldamericancentury.org/healthcare>