

POLICY PRIORITIES



Medical Debt

At Undue Medical Debt, our mission is to end medical debt — and our policy work is a core part of that mission.

The debt relief we provide reduces mental and financial distress for millions of people and reminds us all, from policymakers and elected officials to employers and healthcare providers, that we can do better. Guided by the stories of the people we help, Undue works to inform and deepen policy conversations to make our nation's approach to financing healthcare fairer and more affordable for patients.

Our guiding principle: Medical debt is the result of failed policies and systems, not people — and individual patients shouldn't bear the burden of this systemic failure.

- 1 Affordable and comprehensive health coverage**

Access to affordable health coverage that serves people's needs and sets reasonable expectations for out-of-pocket costs is the surest way to secure health and financial well-being. These costs should never exceed more than 10% of income. Coverage should be simple enough for patients to understand without becoming experts in plan design.
- 2 Access to robust financial assistance (including early screening) and reasonable payment plans**

Clearly communicating billing expectations, financial assistance options and payment plans is critical when so many patients struggle to afford their bills. Importantly, patients should be screened for financial help early in the process without the burden of paperwork (also called presumptive eligibility). Patients also need reasonable payment options that fit their budget. Fair and simple screening and billing practices make it easier for everyone to understand the process.
- 3 Ban extraordinary collection actions**

Patients should never face lawsuits, liens, wage garnishment or the repossession of wheelchairs or prosthetics over a medical bill. Ending extraordinary collection actions (ECAs) like these is critical to rebuilding trust between providers and patients — and affirms that medical debts are not patients' fault.
- 4 Evaluate cost-containment approaches based on whether they lower patient out-of-pocket costs**

Are policy solutions actually lowering what patients pay for their care? As policymakers turn their focus to cost containment (ex: breaking up common ownership of health plans and providers, constraining hospital pricing, reducing administrative waste and developing innovative payment models), they must clearly show how each of these efforts will lower out-of-pocket costs — and thus reduce medical debt for Americans.
- 5 Data and accountability**

To solve the medical debt crisis, we need accessible and consistent medical debt metrics. How prevalent is medical debt? How does it impact patients? And how successful are policy interventions intended to prevent medical debt? Measuring and monitoring these metrics is critical to shaping solutions and ensuring they are working.