Healthcare Financing Comparison Checklist

A Member's Guide to Comparing Medical Payment and Financing Options

Paying for healthcare can be expensive, particularly when facing an unexpected medical bill, planned surgery, dental procedure, prescription expense, or other out-of-pocket healthcare cost.

Several companies offer financing options for healthcare expenses. However, interest rates, repayment requirements, promotional offers, fees, and provider participation can vary significantly.

Before signing a financing agreement for a medical bill, procedure, surgery, dental treatment, or other healthcare expense, consider using this checklist to compare your options and understand the total financial commitment.

The goal is to help members look beyond the advertised monthly payment and understand the actual cost, risks, and obligations of borrowing.

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1. Compare Financing Companies

Identify at least two financing options before making a decision, if possible.

Comparison Item	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3
Financing company name			
Website/contact information			
Type of financing (credit card, installment loan, payment plan, etc.)			
Minimum financing amount			
Maximum financing amount			
Can financing be used for my specific service?			
Does the company work with my chosen provider or facility?			
Can I use financing for a self-pay/cash-pay procedure?			
Can financing cover an existing medical bill?			
Can I finance multiple providers or facilities?			

2. Compare Interest Rates and Borrowing Costs

Do not compare financing options based on monthly payments alone. Look at the total amount you will repay.

Comparison Item	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3
Advertised APR			
Actual APR offered to me			
Is the APR fixed or variable?			
Is there an introductory/promotional APR?			
How long does the promotional rate last?			
What APR applies after the promotion?			
Are there origination fees?			
Are there annual or account fees?			
Are there late-payment fees?			
Are there returned-payment fees?			
Are there prepayment penalties?			
Are there other fees?			
Total amount financed			
Estimated total interest			
Total amount I will repay			

3. Understand Promotional and Deferred-Interest Offers

Important: A 0% promotional offer does not always mean interest-free financing.

Some financing programs use deferred interest. This means interest may accumulate during the promotional period and become payable if the promotional balance is not paid in full by the deadline.

Ask these questions:

- Is this a true 0% APR offer or a deferred-interest promotion?
- Does interest accrue during the promotional period?
- Will accumulated interest be charged retroactively if I do not pay the balance in full?
- What happens if I have even a small balance remaining when the promotional period ends?
- What is the exact promotional expiration date?
- What is the APR after the promotional period?
- Will my minimum monthly payments pay off the balance before the promotion expires?
- Can I make additional payments without penalties?
- How are payments allocated between promotional and non-promotional balances?
- Will I receive advance notice before the promotional period ends?

Member reminder: Calculate the monthly payment needed to pay off the entire promotional balance before its expiration date. Do not assume the lender's minimum payment will accomplish this.

4. Understand Credit Requirements

Comparison Item	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3
Is a credit check required?			
Is it a hard or soft credit inquiry?			
What credit score is generally required?			
Are applicants with limited credit history considered?			
Are applicants with lower credit scores considered?			
Is a co-applicant or cosigner permitted?			
Is income verification required?			
Is employment verification required?			
Does applying affect my credit score?			
Is the account reported to credit bureaus?			
Which credit bureaus receive account information?			
How are late payments reported?			

5. Compare Repayment Terms and Flexibility

- What is the minimum repayment period?
- What is the maximum repayment period?
- What repayment terms are available to me?
- What will my monthly payment be?
- Is the monthly payment fixed or variable?
- When is my first payment due?
- Can I select my monthly payment due date?
- Can I pay more than the minimum payment?
- Can I pay off the balance early without a penalty?
- Can I change my payment schedule?
- Is hardship assistance available if I experience financial difficulty?
- Can payments be deferred or temporarily reduced?
- What happens if I miss a payment?
- What happens if I cannot make payments for an extended period?

6. Verify Provider and Facility Participation

This is particularly important when financing a planned procedure or treatment.

- Does the financing company work directly with my chosen physician?
- Does it work with the hospital, surgical center, dental office, or other facility?
- Is the specific location participating, or only certain locations?
- Can I use financing if I negotiate a cash-pay price?
- Can I use financing if I am uninsured?
- Can I use financing for services that are not covered by insurance?
- Can I finance professional fees separately from facility fees?
- Can I finance anesthesia, laboratory, imaging, or other related expenses?
- Does the provider accept financing for the full amount or only certain services?
- Can the financing company pay the provider directly?
- Can the funds be paid directly to me?
- What happens if my procedure is canceled or postponed?
- What happens if my provider changes the estimated cost?
- What happens if I receive a refund from the provider?

Important: Confirm participation with BOTH the financing company and the provider. A financing company may approve you for credit without guaranteeing that your chosen provider will accept it.

7. Understand the Financial and Legal Obligations

Before signing:

- Have I received the complete financing agreement?
- Have I reviewed all fees and interest provisions?
- Do I understand whether this is a credit card, installment loan, or another type of financing?
- Am I personally responsible for the entire balance?
- Does the agreement contain an arbitration clause?
- Does the agreement permit the lender to sell or transfer the debt?
- Do I understand the consequences of default?
- Do I understand whether the debt can be sent to collections?
- Have I confirmed whether any promotional terms can be revoked?
- Do I have a copy of the signed agreement?
- Do I know how to contact customer service or dispute a charge?

8. Compare the Actual Cost of Financing

Before accepting an offer, complete the following calculations. **Company 1** **Company 2** **Company 3**

Financial Detail	Amount
Provider's quoted price	$
Cash-pay discount, if available	$
Final amount owed to provider	$
Amount I plan to finance	$
Down payment	$
APR	%
Repayment period	Months
Monthly payment	$
Estimated total interest	$
Additional fees	$
Total amount repaid to financing company	$
Total out-of-pocket cost, including down payment	$

Remember to compare the financing cost against the provider's cash-pay price. Sometimes negotiating a lower cash price or arranging a provider payment plan may be less expensive than borrowing.

9. Explore Alternatives Before Borrowing

Before committing to financing, consider whether another option may be more affordable.

- Ask the provider for its lowest cash-pay price.
- Ask whether the provider offers an in-house payment plan.
- Request an itemized estimate or bill.
- Request a Good Faith Estimate when applicable.
- Compare prices at other qualified providers or facilities.
- Ask whether the provider offers financial assistance or charity care.
- Determine whether an existing bill can be negotiated.
- Check whether a prescription discount program can reduce medication costs.
- Check whether insurance or another existing benefit may cover part of the expense.
- Investigate nonprofit organizations or condition-specific assistance programs.
- Consider whether delaying a nonurgent service to save money is reasonable.

10. Final Decision Checklist

Before selecting a financing option, make sure you can answer YES to the following:

- I know the exact amount I am borrowing.
- I know the actual APR I have been approved for.
- I understand all promotional-interest terms.
- I know the repayment period.
- I know the total amount I will repay.
- I understand all additional fees.
- I have confirmed that my provider or facility accepts the financing.
- I understand how the financing will affect my credit.
- I can comfortably afford the monthly payment.
- I have considered less expensive alternatives.
- I have reviewed and saved the complete financing agreement.

My selected financing option: _____

Why I selected this option: _____

Estimated monthly payment: $_____

Estimated total repayment: $_____

Date of decision: _____

Important Member Information

Healthcare financing is a form of borrowing, not a healthcare benefit, insurance policy, or discount program. Approval is not guaranteed, and financing may increase the total cost of treatment.

Always review the complete agreement and confirm the terms offered to you personally. Advertised rates and promotional terms may not apply to every applicant.

The MESH Collective provides educational resources to help members make more informed decisions. Members should contact the financing company directly regarding specific eligibility, approval, interest rates, repayment obligations, and contractual terms.

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