

**A CONSUMER'S GUIDE
TO
GETTING AND KEEPING HEALTH INSURANCE
IN
ILLINOIS**

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This guide is intended to help consumers understand their protections under federal and state law. The authors have made every attempt to assure that the information presented in this guide is accurate as of the date of publication. However, the guide is a summary, and should not be used as a substitute for legal, accounting, or other expert professional advice. Readers should consult insurance regulators or other competent professionals for guidance in making health insurance decisions. The authors, Georgetown University, and the Institute for Health Care Research and Policy specifically disclaim any personal liability, loss or risk incurred as a consequence of the use and application, either directly or indirectly, of any information presented herein.

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A CONSUMER'S GUIDE TO GETTING AND KEEPING HEALTH INSURANCE IN ILLINOIS

As an Illinois resident, you have rights under federal and state law that will protect you when you seek to buy, keep, or switch your health insurance, even if you have a serious health condition.

This guide describes your protections as an Illinois resident. Chapter 1 gives an overview of your protections. Chapters 2 and 3 explain your protections under group and individual health plans. Chapter 4 highlights your protections as a small employer. Chapter 5 summarizes help that may be available to you if you cannot afford health coverage. If you move away from Illinois, your protections may change. Since this guide is a summary, it may not answer all of your questions. For places to contact for more information, see page 31. For information about how to find consumer guides for other states on the Internet, see page 31. A list of helpful terms and their definitions begins on page 32. These terms are in **boldface type** the first time they appear.

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CHAPTER 1

A SUMMARY OF YOUR PROTECTIONS

Numerous state and federal laws make it easier for people with pre-existing conditions to get or keep **health insurance**, or to change from one **health plan** to another. A federal law, known as the **Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)** sets national standards for all health plans. In addition, states can pass different reforms for the health plans they regulate (**fully insured group health plans** and **individual health plans**), so your protections may vary if you leave Illinois. Neither federal nor state laws protect your access to health insurance in all circumstances. So please read this guide carefully.

The following information summarizes how federal and state laws do – or do not – protect you as an Illinois resident.

HOW AM I PROTECTED?

In Illinois, as in many other states, your health insurance options are somewhat dependent on your **health status**. Even if you are sick, however, the laws protect you in the following ways.

- *Coverage under your **group health plan** (if your employer offers one) cannot be denied or limited, nor can you be required to pay more, because of your health status. This is called **nondiscrimination**. (See page 5.)*
- *All group health plans in Illinois must limit exclusion of pre-existing conditions. There are rules about what counts as a pre-existing condition and how long you must wait before a new group health plan will begin to pay for care for that condition. Generally, if you join a new group health plan, your old coverage will be credited toward the **pre-existing condition exclusion period**, provided you did not have a long break in coverage. (See pages 7.)*
- *Your health insurance cannot be canceled because you get sick. Most health insurance is **guaranteed renewable**. (See pages 14, 19, and 24.)*
- *If you leave your job, you may be able to remain in your old group health plan for a certain length of time. This is called **COBRA** continuation coverage or **state continuation coverage**. It can help when you are between jobs or waiting for a new health plan to cover your pre-existing condition. There are limits on what you can be charged for this coverage. (See page 14.)*

- *If you lose your group health insurance and meet other qualifications, you will be **federally eligible**. If so, you can buy an individual health plan from the **Illinois Comprehensive Health Insurance Plan (CHIP)**. You will not face a new pre-existing condition exclusion period. There are limits on what you can be charged for CHIP coverage. (See page 19.)*
- *If you have had difficulty obtaining affordable individual health insurance because of your health condition or if you have one of 31 presumptive medical conditions, you may also be eligible for CHIP coverage. In this case you may face a new pre-existing condition exclusion period. (See page 20.)*
- *If you are a small employer buying a group health plan, you cannot be turned down because of the **health status**, age, or any factor that might predict the use of health services of those in your group. All health plans for small employers must be sold on a **guaranteed issue** basis. (See page 24.)*
- *If you are a small employer buying a group health plan then your premiums can vary due to health status, age, industry, or other characteristics. There are limits on what you can be charged based on health status. Even within these limits, however, premiums can be significantly higher if someone in your group has a serious health condition. (See page 24.)*
- *If you have low or modest household income, you may be eligible for free or subsidized health coverage for yourself or members of your family. The **Illinois Medicaid** program offers free or subsidized health coverage for pregnant women, families with children, elderly and disabled individuals with very low incomes and women diagnosed with breast or cervical cancer. (See page 26.)*
- *If your children are 18 years old or younger and meets certain financial qualifications, you may be able to buy insurance for them or receive assistance paying for private health insurance through the **Illinois KidCare Program**. (See page 28.)*

WHAT ARE THE LIMITS ON MY PROTECTIONS?

As important as they are, the federal and state health insurance reforms are limited. Therefore, you also should understand how the laws do *not* protect you.

- *If you change jobs, you usually cannot take your old health benefits with you. Except when you exercise your federal COBRA or state continuation rights, you are not entitled to take your actual group health coverage with you when you leave a job. Your new health plan may not cover all of the benefits or the same doctors that your old plan did. (See page 11.)*
- *If you change jobs, your new employer may not offer you health benefits. If your employer offers health benefits then the decision on whether to offer you health insurance cannot be based on factors related to your health status. (See page 5.)*
- *If you get a new job with health benefits, your coverage may not start right away. Employers and health maintenance organizations (**HMOs**) can require **waiting periods** before your health benefits begin. (See page 6.)*
- *If you have a break in coverage, you may have to satisfy a new pre-existing condition exclusion period when you join a new group health plan. (See page 7.)*
- *Even if your coverage is **continuous**, there may be a pre-existing condition exclusion period for some benefits if you join a group health plan that covers benefits your old plan did not. For example, say you move from a group plan that does not cover prescription drugs to one that does. You may have to wait up to one year before your new health plan will pay for drugs prescribed to treat a pre-existing condition. (See page 9.)*
- *If you work for certain non-federal public employers in Illinois, not all of the group health plan protections may apply to you. (See page 10.)*
- *In Illinois, your access to individual health insurance may depend on your health status. Private insurers are not prohibited from turning you down, charging more, or limiting coverage because of pre-existing conditions. If you are federally eligible, the Illinois Comprehensive Health Insurance Plan is your only guaranteed access to individual health insurance coverage, though you may be able to buy individual health insurance from private insurance companies. (See page 12.)*
- *If you enroll in the Illinois Comprehensive Health Insurance Plan and are not federally eligible, you will face a pre-existing condition exclusion period. (See page 19.)*

CHAPTER 2

YOUR PROTECTIONS UNDER GROUP HEALTH PLANS

This chapter describes the protections that you have in group health plans, such as those offered by employers or labor unions. Your protections will vary somewhat, depending on whether your plan is a fully insured group health plan or a **self-insured group health plan**. The plan's benefits information must indicate whether the plan is self-insured.

WHEN DOES A GROUP HEALTH PLAN HAVE TO LET ME IN?

- *You have to be eligible for the group health plan.* For example, your employer may not give health benefits to all employees. Or, your employer may offer an HMO plan that you cannot join because you live outside of the plan's service area.
- *You cannot be turned away or charged more because of your health status.* Health status means your medical condition or history, genetic information, or disability. This protection is called nondiscrimination. Employers may refuse or restrict coverage for other reasons (such as part time employment), as long as these are unrelated to health status and applied consistently.

Discrimination due to health status is not permitted

The Acme Company offers two different health plans. Full time employees are offered a high option plan that covers prescription drugs; part time employees are offered a low option plan that does not. This is *permitted* under the law. By contrast, in a cost-cutting move, Acme restricts its high option plan to those employees who can pass a physical examination. This is *not permitted* under the law.

- *You must be given a special opportunity to sign up for your group health plan if certain changes happen to your family.* In addition to any regular **enrollment period** your employer or group health plan offers, you must be offered a special, 30-day opportunity to enroll in your group health plan after certain events. You can elect coverage at this time. If your group plan offers family coverage, your dependents can elect coverage as well. Enrollment during a **special enrollment period** is *not* considered **late enrollment**.

Certain changes can trigger a special enrollment opportunity

- The birth, adoption, or placement for adoption of a child
- Marriage
- Loss of other coverage (for example, that you or your dependents had through yourself or another family member and lost because of death, divorce, legal separation, termination, retirement, or reduction in hours worked.)

- *Under Illinois law, newborns are automatically covered under the parents' fully insured health plan for the first 31 days, if the plan covers dependents. The insurer may require that the parent enroll the child within the 31 days in order to continue coverage beyond the 31 days.*
- *If you have a dependent, disabled child, that child may remain covered under your fully insured group health plan after he or she reaches the age at which dependent coverage is usually terminated. The dependent adult will not be issued a separate policy but can remain on your policy, provided that it remains in force.*
- *When you begin a new job, your employer may require a waiting period before you can sign up for health coverage. This waiting period is called an **HMO affiliation period**, and you will not have health insurance coverage during this time. This waiting period, however, must be applied consistently and cannot vary due to your health status.*
- *If you have to take leave from your job due to illness, the birth or adoption of a child, or to care for a seriously ill family member, you may be able to keep your group health coverage for a limited time. A federal law known as the **Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)** guarantees you up to 12 weeks of job-protected leave in these circumstances.*

The FMLA applies to you if you work at a company with 50 or more employees.

If you qualify for leave under the FMLA, your employer must continue your health benefits. You will have to continue paying your share of the premium.

If you decide not to return to work at the end of the leave period, your employer may require you to pay back the employer's share of the health insurance premium. However, if you don't return to work because of factors outside your control (such as a need to continue caring for a sick family member, or because your spouse is transferred to a job in a distant city), you will not have to repay the premium.

For more information about your rights under the FMLA, contact the **U.S. Department of Labor**.

CAN A GROUP HEALTH PLAN LIMIT MY COVERAGE FOR PRE-EXISTING CONDITIONS?

When you first enroll in a group health plan, the employer or insurance company may ask if you have any pre-existing conditions. Or, if you make a claim during the first year of coverage, the plan may **look back** to see whether it was for such a condition. If so, it may try to exclude coverage for services related to that condition for a certain length of time. However, federal and state laws protect you by placing limits on these pre-existing condition exclusion periods under group health plans. In some cases, your protections will vary depending on the type of group health plan you belong to.

- *A group health plan can count as pre-existing conditions only those for which you actually received (or were recommended to receive) a diagnosis, treatment or medical advice within the 6 months immediately before you joined the plan. This period is called the look back period.*
- *Group health plans cannot apply a pre-existing condition exclusion period for pregnancy, newborns, newly adopted children, children placed for adoption, or genetic information.*
- *Coverage for pre-existing conditions can be excluded under group health plans only for a limited time. The maximum period is 12 months. However, if you enroll late in a group health plan (after you were hired and not during a regular or special enrollment period) you may have a pre-existing condition exclusion period of up to 18 months.*
- *When you join a new group health plan, the law protects you from a new pre-existing condition exclusion period, provided you maintain continuous **creditable coverage**. Most health insurance is creditable coverage.*

What is creditable coverage?

Most health insurance counts as creditable coverage, including:

Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHBP)	Medicare
Group health insurance (including COBRA)	Military health coverage (CHAMPUS, TRICARE)
Indian Health Service	State health insurance high risk pools
Individual health insurance	
Medicaid	

In most cases, you should get a certificate of creditable coverage when you leave a health plan. You also can request certificates at other times. If you cannot get one, you can submit other proof, such as old health plan ID cards or statements from your doctor showing bills paid by your health insurance plan.

- *Coverage counts as continuous if it is not interrupted by a break of 63 or more days in a row.* The new coverage must be in place on the 63rd day in order to avoid any pre-existing condition exclusions.

What is continuous coverage?

You can get continuous coverage under one plan, or under several plans, as long as you don't have a lapse of 63 or more consecutive days.

Take Art, who has diabetes. Ajax Company covered him under its group health plan for 9 months, but he lost his job and health coverage. Then, 45 days later, Art found a new job at Beta Corporation and had health coverage for 9 more months. Art changed jobs again. His new company, Charter, has a health plan that covers care for diabetes but excludes pre-existing conditions for 12 months. Charter must cover Art's diabetes care immediately, because his 18 months of prior continuous coverage are credited against the 12-month extension.

Now consider a slightly different situation. Assume Art was uninsured for 90 days between his jobs at Ajax and Beta. In this case, Charter will credit coverage only under Beta's plan toward the 12-month pre-existing condition exclusion period. Charter's plan will begin paying for Art's diabetes care in 3 months (1 year minus 9 months). Art does not get credit for his coverage at Ajax since he had a break of more than 63 consecutive days.

- *In determining continuous coverage, employer-imposed waiting periods and HMO affiliation periods do not count as a break in coverage.* If your new plan imposes a pre-existing condition exclusion period, you can credit time under your prior coverage toward it. If your employer requires a waiting period, the pre-existing condition exclusion period begins on the first day of the waiting period. HMOs that require an affiliation period cannot exclude coverage for pre-existing conditions.
- *Your protections may differ if you move to a group health plan that offers more benefits than your old one did.* Plans can look back to determine whether your previous health plan covered prescription drugs, mental health, substance abuse, dental care, or vision care. If you did not have continuous coverage for one or more of these categories of benefits, your new group health plan may impose a pre-existing condition exclusion period for that category. Plans that use this method of crediting prior coverage must use it for everyone and must disclose this to you when you enroll.

Even if coverage is continuous, there may be an exclusion for certain benefits

Sue needs prescription medication to control her blood pressure. She had 2 years of continuous coverage under her employer's group health plan, which did not cover prescription drugs. Sue changes jobs, and her new employer's fully insured plan does cover prescription drugs. However, because her prior policy did not, the new plan refuses to cover her blood pressure medicine for 6 months.

Question: Is this permitted?

Answer: Yes. However, the plan must pay for covered doctor visits, hospital care, and other services for Sue's high blood pressure. It also must pay for covered prescription drugs she needs for other conditions that were not pre-existing.

- *No pre-existing condition exclusion period can be applied without appropriate notice.* Your group health plan must inform you, in writing, if it intends to impose such a period. Also, if needed, it must help you get a certificate of creditable coverage from your old health plan.

LIMITS TO PROTECTIONS FOR CERTAIN GOVERNMENT WORKERS

Federal law permits state, county, and local governments to exempt their employees in self-insured plans from some of the protections discussed previously in this chapter. Public employers must make this choice annually. When they do so, they are required to notify the federal government and specify which health insurance protections will not apply to their employees' health insurance plan.

According to the latest list available from the federal government, some non-federal government employers in Illinois have decided that certain health insurance protections will not apply to their employees. (See below) Also, other non-federal public employers in Illinois may have made this choice after this guide was written. If you are not sure about your protections under your public employee health plan, you should contact your employer.

Non-Governmental Employer Plans Which May Not Be Subject to all the Protections Described in this Guide.	
Belvidere Community Unit School District #100 Bloomington Public School District #87 Bradford Community Unit School District #1 City of Bloomington City of Canton City of Chicago City of Clinton City of Flora City of Crest Hill City of Kewanee City of Loves Park City of Monmouth City of Newton City of Princeton City of St. Charles City of Washington College of DuPage Collinsville Community Unit School District #10 Community College District #514 Community Unit School District #205 County of Henry County of Jasper County of McLean County of Mercer County of Peoria County of St. Clair County of Tazewell County of Will County of Woodford Creve Coeur School District Dakota Community Unit School District #201 Elementary School District #181	Fenton High School District #100 Geneseo Community Unit School District #228 Glenbard Township High School District #87 Hinsdale Township High School District #86 (Teachers) Hinsdale Township High School District #86 (Others) Illini Bluffs Unit School District #327 Illinois Park Employees Health Network Illinois Valley Central Unit School District #321 Indian Prairie Unit School District #204 Indian Springs School District #109 Jacksonville Unit School District #117 Kewanee Community School District #229 Kinnikinnick community Consolidated School District #131 LaSalle-Peru Township High School Lyons Township Elementary School District Lyons Township High School District #204 Maine Township High School District #207 McHenry Elementary School District #15 McLean County Unit District #5 Metamora Township High School District #122 Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago Midwest Central Community Unit School District #191 Monmouth Unit School District #38 Morton Community Unit School District #709 Naperville Community Unit School District #203 North Shore Sanitary District North Suburban Employee Benefit Cooperative Olympia Community Unit School District #16 Pecatonica Community Unit School District #321 Pekin Community High School District #303 Peoria Park District

Peoria Public School District #150 Perry Memorial Hospital Rockford Mass Transit District Rock Island Public Schools Rockton School District #140 Salem Community High School #600 Salem Township Hospital School Association for Special Ed for DuPage County Suburban Bus Division of Regional Transportation Authority	Thornton Fractional Township High School District #215 Town of Normal Township High School District #214 Tremont Community School District #702 Valley View Community Unit School #365-U Village of Downers Grove Village of Forest View Village of Northfield West Chicago Elementary School #33 Wood Dale School District #7 Wood Ridge School District #68
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AS YOU ARE LEAVING GROUP COVERAGE...

- If you are leaving your job or otherwise losing access to your group health coverage, you may be able to remain covered under the group health plan for a limited time. In addition, you may have special protections when buying certain kinds of individual health coverage. See Chapter 3 for more information about COBRA and state continuation coverage, Illinois extension of coverage protection, conversion coverage, and Illinois Comprehensive Health Plan coverage for “federally eligible individuals.”*

CHAPTER 3

YOUR PROTECTIONS WHEN BUYING INDIVIDUAL HEALTH INSURANCE

If you do not have access to employer-sponsored group insurance, you may want to buy an individual health plan from a private health insurance company or you may be eligible for coverage under a program offered by the State of Illinois, the Comprehensive Health Insurance Plan (CHIP). In Illinois – as in most other states – you have limited guaranteed access to private individual health insurance coverage. There are, however, some alternatives – such as COBRA coverage and CHIP coverage. This chapter summarizes your protections under different kinds of health plan coverage.

INDIVIDUAL HEALTH INSURANCE SOLD BY PRIVATE INSURERS

WHEN DO INDIVIDUAL HEALTH INSURERS HAVE TO SELL ME COVERAGE?

In Illinois, your ability to buy individual health coverage from a private insurance company may depend on your health status.

- *In general, companies that sell individual health insurance in Illinois are free to turn you down because of your health status and other factors. When applying for individual coverage, you may be asked questions about health conditions you have now or have had in the past. Depending on your health status, insurers might refuse to sell you coverage or offer to sell you a policy that has special limitations on what it covers. If you are turned down or offered a policy with reductions or restrictions, you may be eligible for CHIP coverage. (See page 19.)*
- *Under Illinois law, newborns are automatically covered under the parents' individual health plan for the first 31 days, if the plan covers dependents. The insurer may require that the parent enroll the child within the 31 days in order to continue coverage beyond the 31 days.*
- *If you have a dependent, disable child, that child may remain covered under your fully insured group health plan after he reaches the age at which dependent coverage is usually terminated. The dependent adult will not be issued a separate policy but can remain on your policy, provided that it remains in force.*

WHAT WILL MY INDIVIDUAL HEALTH PLAN COVER?

- *It depends on what you buy.* Illinois does not require health insurers in the individual market to sell standardized policies. Health plans can design different policies and you will have to read and compare them carefully. However, Illinois does require all health plans to cover certain benefits – for example, diabetes care and mammography screening. Check with the Illinois Department of Insurance for more information about mandated benefits.

WHAT ABOUT COVERAGE FOR MY PRE-EXISTING CONDITION?

- *There are different ways that individual health plans can exclude a pre-existing condition.*

The plan can impose an **elimination rider**, which is an amendment to your health insurance contract that permanently excludes coverage for a health condition, body part, or body system. Or a plan can impose an exclusion period for up to 24 months on any pre-existing condition

In addition, if you make a claim during the first 2 years of coverage, your plan can look back 12 months from the time of your application for any symptoms or signs that would have prompted a prudent person to seek medical care, or advice. If it finds such evidence, it can apply a 2 year pre-existing exclusion period for that condition.

- *Pregnancy can be considered a pre-existing condition by individual health plans.* Also, genetic information, without a health condition diagnosed by a health care professional, cannot be used as the basis of a pre-existing condition.
- *Individual health plans do not have to give you credit for prior coverage, unlike group health plans.*

WHAT CAN I BE CHARGED FOR INDIVIDUAL HEALTH COVERAGE?

- *Generally, in Illinois, there are no limits on how much individual premiums can vary due to age, gender, health status, family size, and other factors.*

CAN MY INDIVIDUAL HEALTH INSURANCE POLICY BE CANCELLED?

- *Your coverage cannot be canceled because you get sick.* This is called guaranteed renewability. You have this protection provided that you pay the premiums, do not defraud the company, and, in the case of **managed care plans**, continue to live in the plan service area. However, guaranteed renewability does not protect you from having your premiums go up at renewal.
- *Some insurance companies sell temporary health insurance policies.* Temporary policies are *not* guaranteed renewable. They will only cover you for a limited time, such as 6 months. If you want to renew coverage under a temporary policy after it expires, you will have to reapply and there is no guarantee that coverage will be re-issued at all or at the same price.

COBRA CONTINUATION COVERAGE

WHEN DO I HAVE TO BE OFFERED COBRA COVERAGE?

- *If you are leaving your job and you had group coverage, you may be able to stay in your group plan for an extended time through COBRA coverage.* The information presented below was taken from publications prepared by the U.S. Department of Labor. You should contact them for more information about your rights under COBRA.
- *To qualify for COBRA continuation coverage, you must meet 3 criteria:*

First, you must work for an employer with 20 or more employees. If you work for an employer with 2-19 employees, you may qualify for state continuation coverage. (See below.)

Second, you must be covered under the employer's group health plan as an employee or as the spouse or dependent child of an employee.

Finally, you must have a qualifying event that would cause you to lose your group health coverage.

COBRA QUALIFYING EVENTS

For employees

- Voluntary or involuntary termination of employment for reasons other than gross misconduct
- Reduction in numbers of hours worked

For spouses

- Loss of coverage by the employee because of one of the qualifying events listed above
- Covered employee becomes eligible for Medicare
- Divorce or legal separation of the covered employee
- Death of the covered employee

For dependent children

- Loss of coverage because of any of the qualifying events listed for spouses
- Loss of status as a dependent child under the plan rules

- *Each person who is eligible for COBRA continuation can make his or her own decision.* If your dependents were covered under your employer plan, they may independently elect COBRA coverage as well.
- *To qualify as federally eligible, you must elect and exhaust any COBRA continuation coverage that is available to you.*
- *You must be notified of your COBRA rights when you join the group health plan, and again if you qualify for COBRA coverage.* The notice rules are somewhat complicated and you should contact the U.S. Department of Labor for more information.

In general, if the event that qualifies you for COBRA coverage involves the death, termination, reduction in hours worked, or Medicare eligibility of a covered worker, the employer has 30 days to notify the group health plan of this event. However, if the qualifying event involves divorce or legal separation or loss of dependent status, YOU have 60 days to notify the group health plan. Once it has been notified of the qualifying event, the group health plan has 14 days to send you a notice about how to elect COBRA coverage. Each member of your family eligible for COBRA coverage then has 60 days to make this election.

Once you elect COBRA, coverage will begin retroactive to the qualifying event. You will have to pay premiums dating back to this period.

WHAT WILL COBRA COVER?

- *Your covered health benefits under COBRA will be the same as those you had before you qualified for COBRA.* For example, if you had coverage for medical, hospitalization, dental, vision, and prescription drug benefits before COBRA, you can continue coverage for all of these benefits under COBRA. If these benefits were covered under more than one plan (for example, a separate health insurance and dental insurance plan) you can choose to continue coverage under any or all of the plans. Life insurance is not covered by COBRA.

If your employer changes the health benefits package after your qualifying event, you must be offered coverage identical to that available to other active employees who are covered under the plan.

WHAT ABOUT COVERAGE FOR MY PRE-EXISTING CONDITION?

- *Because your group coverage is continuing, you will not have a new pre-existing condition exclusion period under COBRA.* However, if you were in the middle of a pre-existing condition exclusion period when your qualifying event occurred, you will have to finish it.

WHAT CAN I BE CHARGED FOR COBRA COVERAGE?

- *You must pay the entire premium (employer and employee share, plus a 2% administrative fee) for COBRA continuation coverage.* The first premium must be paid within 45 days of electing COBRA coverage.
- *If you elect the 11-month disability extension, the premium will increase to 150% of the total cost of coverage.* See below for more information about the disability extension.

HOW LONG DOES COBRA COVERAGE LAST?

- *COBRA coverage generally lasts up to 18 months and cannot be renewed beyond that point.* However, certain disabled people can opt for coverage up to 29 months, and dependents are sometimes eligible for up to 36 months of COBRA continuation coverage, depending on their qualifying event.

In addition, special rules for disabled individuals may extend the maximum period of coverage to 29 months. To qualify for the disability extension, you must have been disabled at the time of your COBRA qualifying event (such as termination of employment or reduction in hours) or within 60 days of that qualifying event. You must obtain this disability determination from the Social Security Administration, and you must notify your group health plan of this disability determination.

HOW LONG CAN COBRA COVERAGE LAST?

Qualifying event(s)	Eligible person(s)	Coverage
Termination Reduced hours	Employee Spouse Dependent child	18 months *
Employee enrolls in Medicare Divorce or legal separation Death of covered employee	Spouse Dependent child	36 months
Loss of "dependent child" status	Dependent child	36 months

* Certain disabled persons and their eligible family members can extend coverage an additional 11 months, for a total of up to 29 months.

- *Usually, COBRA continuation coverage ends when you join a new health plan. However, if your new plan has a waiting period or a pre-existing condition exclusion period, you can keep whatever COBRA continuation coverage you have left during that period. For specifics, ask your former employer or contact the U.S. Department of Labor.*
- *COBRA coverage also ends if your employer stops offering health benefits to other employees.*
- *COBRA coverage might end if you are in a managed care plan that is available only to people living in a limited geographic area and you move out of that area. However, if you are eligible for COBRA and are moving out of your current health plan's service area, your employer must provide you with the opportunity to switch to a different plan, but only if the employer already offers other plans to its employees. Examples of the other plans your employer may offer you are a managed care plan whose service area includes the area you are moving to, or another plan that does not have a limited service area.*

WHAT ABOUT ILLINOIS CONTINUATION COVERAGE?

- *If your employer offers a fully insured group health plan and you were covered under your group plan for at least 3 months, you may also be eligible for up to 9 months of continuation coverage under an Illinois law that is similar to COBRA. Such state continuation coverage is not required to include dental, vision, drug, or other supplemental benefits that were part of your group policy.*

WHAT ABOUT ILLINOIS SPOUSAL CONTINUATION COVERAGE?

- *Spouses and dependents of divorced, deceased or retired employees, who maintained non-HMO group coverage, may be eligible for a longer period of continuation coverage. Divorced or widowed spouses under the age of 55 and dependent children are eligible for a maximum of 24 months of continuation coverage. However, divorced spouses and spouses of deceased or retired employees, aged 55 or older, are eligible for continuation coverage until they are eligible for Medicare.*

CONVERSION COVERAGE

WHEN DO I HAVE TO BE OFFERED CONVERSION COVERAGE?

- *In Illinois, if you have coverage through an employer's fully insured group health plan for at least 3 months and you become ineligible for that coverage, you are eligible to buy conversion coverage. This is an individual policy you get from the company that insured your previous group plan.*
- *Conversion rights are also available to a surviving spouse and child upon the death of an insured or in the case that they cease to be qualified family member under a group policy.*
- *To qualify, though, you must apply within 31 days of the termination of the group plan or 15 days after notice of the privilege, whichever is later, but in no case later than 60 days after termination.*
- *You do not need to be federally eligible to buy a conversion policy. However, if you do elect a conversion policy, you will lose your federal eligibility status.*

WHAT DOES A CONVERSION POLICY COVER?

- *Conversion policy benefits must meet certain minimum benefit requirements, which may not be the same as those under your former plan.*

WHAT ABOUT COVERAGE FOR MY PRE-EXISTING CONDITION?

- *A conversion policy may not impose a new pre-existing condition exclusion period. However, if you were in a pre-existing exclusion period under your old group health plan when it ended, you may have to finish it.*

HOW MUCH CAN I BE CHARGED FOR CONVERSION COVERAGE?

- *There is no limit on what your insurer can charge for conversion coverage. Premiums are determined based on the age and classification of risk of each person applying for a converted policy. These policies often are more expensive than your prior group coverage.*

CAN MY POLICY BE CANCELLED?

- *Conversion policies, like other individual health insurance policies, are guaranteed renewable. Your coverage cannot be cancelled if you get sick.*

ILLINOIS COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH INSURANCE PLAN

Illinois maintains a state health benefits risk pool, called the Illinois Comprehensive Health Insurance Plan or CHIP, to provide insurance for eligible residents of Illinois who have been denied individual health insurance by a private health insurance company because of a health condition or are federally eligible and qualify for HIPAA-CHIP.

WHEN CAN I GET COVERAGE FROM CHIP?

- *CHIP does not offer family coverage. Each member of your family who wants to enroll in CHIP will have to qualify on his or her own.*
- *If you are federally eligible, you can buy health insurance from CHIP. This is called HIPAA-CHIP. You will not have a pre-existing condition exclusion period.*

To be federally eligible, you must meet certain criteria

No matter where you live in the U.S., if you are federally eligible you are guaranteed the right to buy individual health insurance of some kind with no pre-existing condition exclusion period. In Illinois, you are only guaranteed the right to buy coverage from the CHIP. To be federally eligible in Illinois, you must meet all of the following:

- You must have had 18 months of continuous creditable coverage, *at least the last day of which was under a group health plan.*
- You also must have used up any COBRA or state continuation coverage for which you were eligible.
- You must not be eligible for Medicare, Medicaid or a group health plan.
- You must not have health insurance. (Note, however, if you know your group coverage is about to end, you can apply for coverage for which you *will* be federally eligible.)
- You must apply for health insurance for which you are federally eligible within 90 days of losing your prior coverage.

Federal eligibility ends when you enroll in an individual plan, because the last day of your continuous health coverage must have been in a group plan. You can become federally eligible again by maintaining continuous coverage and rejoining a group health plan.

- *If you are not federally eligible, you can buy coverage from CHIP if you are a resident of Illinois and can demonstrate proof of eligibility.* This is called Traditional CHIP. There are several different ways to show eligibility:
 - You have been turned down for substantially similar individual health insurance coverage by at least one insurance company because of a pre-existing health condition within the last 9 months;
 - You are only able to find private health insurance that is more expensive for you personally than the rate you would pay for CHIP coverage;
 - You have one of 31 medical conditions, such as AIDS, Cystic Fibrosis or Parkinson's disease, for which CHIP provides automatic eligibility.

You only need to show that you are eligible in one of these ways in order to apply for CHIP coverage.

- *CHIP limits the number of people who can enroll in Traditional CHIP.* This limit is based on the availability of state finances used to subsidize this state program. If the limit has been reached when you apply, you may not be able to enroll at that time but your name will be placed on a waiting list. In addition, as enrollment opportunities become available, applicants will be contacted in the order in which their names appear on the waiting list. The enrollment limit does not apply to HIPAA-CHIP. If you are federally eligible you can always enroll in CHIP.

WHAT DOES CHIP COVER?

- *CHIP offers coverage through a Preferred Provider Organization (PPO) plan.* The PPO has a network of doctors and hospitals in your area. Coverage includes hospital and physician care, diagnostic tests and x-rays, prescription drugs and other services.
- *Both those eligible for HIPAA-CHIP and Traditional-CHIP receive basically the same benefit options.* However, HIPAA-CHIP participants are not subject to a pre-existing condition limitation and benefits for inpatient treatment of mental illness are limited to 45 days per calendar year.
- *CHIP offers you the choice of four cost sharing arrangements.* The annual deductible options are \$500, \$1,000, \$1,500 and \$2,500. In addition, you will be responsible for a coinsurance charge each time you receive care.

Following the payment of your deductible, you will be charged 20% coinsurance for care from a PPO provider and 40% coinsurance for care from a non-PPO provider. After you pay a maximum amount for covered services (also called out-of-pocket limit) CHIP will pay 100% of the cost of your covered care.

CHIP's out-of pocket limit is different depending on if the care you receive is in-network or out-of-network. The limit is \$1,500 above your deductible for in-network care and \$4,500 above your deductible for out-of-network care.

- *CHIP provides a separate Prescription Drug Card Program for all CHIP participants except those on Medicare.* Under this program, participants pay a separate co-pay of 20% of the cost of any covered generic drug or branded prescription, subject to certain limitations. Under this program, a participant does not have to satisfy any deductible before receiving prescription benefits.

- *CHIP does not provide routine maternity benefits.* However, at the time of enrollment or marriage, participants may purchase a maternity indemnity rider in \$500 increments that will cover limited maternity benefits. The maximum number of increments available is based on your geographical area, but in no case can you buy more than 8 increments.
- *CHIP also offers a separate benefit plan policy for those eligible persons who are enrolled in both Parts A and B of Medicare due to disability or end-stage renal disease.* This plan is secondary to Medicare and the benefits provided by CHIP are reduced by any amounts that are payable under Medicare Parts A and B.

WHAT ABOUT COVERAGE FOR MY PRE-EXISTING CONDITION?

- *If you are federally eligible, you will not receive a pre-existing condition exclusion when you enroll in HIPAA-CHIP.*
- *If you are not federally eligible, you will have a 6-month pre-existing condition exclusion period when you first enroll in CHIP.* When you enroll, CHIP will look back 6 months to see if you had a condition for which you actually received medical advice, diagnosis, care or treatment. CHIP will not be able to credit your prior coverage against this pre-existing exclusion period.
- *Pregnancy is not considered a pre-existing condition, but CHIP does not provide any routine maternity benefits.* However, an optional, limited, maternity rider is available at the time you initially enroll in CHIP or in the case that you are a participant, within 60 days of marriage. (See above)

WHAT CAN I BE CHARGED FOR CHIP COVERAGE?

- *CHIP premiums are set between 125% and 150% of the average rate charged for comparable individual coverage by five or more of the largest companies doing business in Illinois.* Premiums will vary based on the plan that you are eligible for and your age, gender, geographical area, and the deductible that you choose.

For example, as of February 1, 2002, the monthly premium for a 24-year-old single man living in Chicago with Traditional CHIP coverage, for himself only, ranges from \$182 to \$245, depending on the deductible he chooses. By contrast, the monthly premium for a 64-year-old single woman living in Chicago with Traditional CHIP coverage, for herself only, ranges from \$647 to \$824.

- *Premiums are currently slightly lower for HIPPA-CHIP participants versus those eligible for Traditional-CHIP.*
- *CHIP premium rate tables are usually updated and changed bi-annually, effective February 1 and August 1 of each year, and are subject to changes without notice.*

For further information about CHIP rates, visit the CHIP website at <http://www.chip.state.il.us> or call 1-800-962-8384.

HOW LONG DOES CHIP COVERAGE LAST?

- *CHIP policies are renewable as long as you pay your premiums, continue to reside in Illinois, and meet other eligibility requirements.*

CHAPTER 4

YOUR PROTECTIONS AS A SMALL EMPLOYER OR SELF-EMPLOYED PERSON

Federal law extends certain protections to employers seeking to buy health insurance for themselves and their workers. Illinois has enacted reforms to expand some of these protections. Generally, small employers are those that employ 2-50 employees. Please note, however, that the definitions of small employer and employee are somewhat different under federal and state law. Check with the Illinois Department of Insurance to be sure that you know which protections apply to your group.

DO INSURANCE COMPANIES HAVE TO SELL ME HEALTH INSURANCE?

- *With few exceptions, small employers cannot be turned down.* This is called guaranteed issue. If you employ at least 2 but not more than 50 people, health insurance companies must sell you any **small group health plan** they sell to other small employers. However, they can require that a minimum percentage of your eligible employees sign up for coverage. They can also require you to pay a minimum share of your workers' premiums. If you are buying a **large group health plan** for 51 or more employees, your group can be turned down.

- *Your insurance cannot be canceled because someone in your group becomes sick.* This is called guaranteed renewability and it applies to group plans of all sizes. Insurers can impose other conditions, however. They can require you to meet minimum participation and contribution rates in order to renew your coverage. Additionally, they can refuse to renew your coverage for nonpayment of premiums or if you commit fraud, or if they are discontinuing that insurance product. In the latter case, they must give you a chance to buy other plans they sell to groups of your size.

CAN I BE CHARGED MORE BECAUSE OF MY GROUP'S HEALTH STATUS?

- *Illinois limits how much premiums can vary due to a small group's health status.* Even within these limits, however, premiums can be significantly higher if someone in your small group has a serious health condition. In addition, premiums can vary based on age, industry, and other characteristics of those in your group.

- *Illinois also limits how much small group plan premiums can increase at renewal because of claims experience.*

- *For groups with more than 50 employees, Illinois does not limit premium variations when coverage is first issued or renewed.*

Check with the Illinois Department of Insurance if you have any questions about your group plan premiums.

WHAT IF I AM SELF-EMPLOYED?

- *If you are self-employed with no other workers, you are not eligible to buy a group health plan on your own (though you may be able to join another group health plan through a family member). Therefore, the laws that protect employers' access to group health plans do not apply to you. Your access to health insurance is protected by the laws that apply to individuals. (See Chapter 3.)*
- *If you are self-employed and buy your own health insurance, you are eligible to deduct an increasing percentage of the cost of your premium from your federal income tax. This deduction is 70% for 2002, and 100% in 2003 and thereafter.*

A WORD ABOUT ASSOCIATION PLANS

- *Some small employers, self-employed people, and other individuals buy health insurance through professional or trade associations. The laws applying to association health coverage can be different than those for other health plans. Check with the Illinois Department of Insurance about your protections in association health plans.*

CHAPTER 5 FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Help is available to certain low-income residents of Illinois who cannot afford to buy health insurance. Medicaid and KidCare offer free or subsidized health insurance coverage, direct medical services or other help. This chapter provides summary information about these programs and contact information for further assistance.

MEDICAID

Medicaid is a program that provides health coverage to some low-income Illinois residents. Medicaid covers families with children and pregnant women, medically needy individuals, the elderly, people with disabilities, and persons with breast or cervical cancer and if state and federal guidelines are met. Legal residents who are not U.S. citizens may be eligible for Medicaid however, questions concerning immigration status and eligibility should be directed to the Illinois Department of Public Aid.

- *In Illinois you may be eligible for Medicaid if you are an individual, a child, a parent of a child, or pregnant, and your family income meets the Medicaid income standards.*

Income eligibility levels for these categories are described below. Your assets and some expenses also may be taken into account, so you should contact the Illinois Department of Public Aid for more information.

Low income persons eligible for Medicaid in Illinois*

<u>Category</u>	<u>Income eligibility</u> (as percent of federal poverty level)
Infant	200% (monthly income of about \$2,503 for family of 3)
Child 1-19	133%
Parent	40%
Pregnant woman	200%

* Eligibility information was compiled from secondary sources, including Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, Families USA, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Covering Kids Program, and may have changed since this guide was published. Contact your state Medicaid program for the most up to date information and for other eligibility requirements that may apply.

To get an idea of how your income compares to the federal poverty level, use the federal poverty guideline issued by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for the year 2002:

<u>Size of Family Unit</u>	<u>Poverty Guideline (annual income)</u>
1	\$ 8,860
2	\$11,940
3	\$15,020

For larger families add \$3,080 for each additional person

So, for example, using this guideline, 133% of the federal poverty level for a family of 3 would be an annual income of \$19,977, or a monthly income of \$1,665.

Contact your state Medicaid program for the most up to date information and for other eligibility requirements that may apply.

- *Parents who receive benefits under TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) should also know that when you get a job and your TANF benefits end, you generally can stay on Medicaid for a 12-month transitional period.*

In addition, your children may qualify for Medicaid if your family's income meets certain income standards. (See above.)

- *Poor elderly or disabled people who get Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits are automatically eligible for Medicaid.*

Disabled individuals should know that if your income earned from a job increases so that you no longer qualify for SSI, you may be able to continue your Medicaid coverage at least for a limited time.

- *Being on TANF or SSI, is not the only way to qualify for Medicaid. For certain categories of people, eligibility for Medicaid is based on the amount of your household income.*
- *Retired or disabled people who have low incomes and are enrolled in Medicare may also qualify for help from Medicaid. Even though your income may be too high to qualify for Medicaid insurance coverage, there may be other ways Medicaid can help you.*

If your household income is below the poverty level, Medicaid will pay your Medicare monthly premium and your Medicare deductibles and coinsurance. This is called the Qualified Medicare Beneficiary (QMB) program.

If your household income is above 100% but below 135% of the poverty level, Medicaid will pay for your monthly Medicare premiums only. This is called the Specified Low-Income Medicare Beneficiary (SLIB) program.

- *Working, disabled persons with higher income levels may be eligible for Medicaid benefits under the Health Benefits for Workers with Disabilities Program (HBWD). To qualify for HBWD, you must be employed, disabled and under the age of 65 with a family income of less than or equal to 200% of the poverty level. HBWD enrollees must pay a premium based on income level.*
- *Persons with breast or cervical cancer or a precancerous condition and are otherwise uninsured, may be eligible for Medicaid under The Health Benefits for Persons with Breast or Cervical Cancer Program. Eligibility for this program is only available to persons who have been screened under the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program.*

For more information regarding the Health Benefits for Persons with Breast or Cervical Cancer Program, call the Breast and Cervical Cancer Eligibility Unit at 1-866-460-0913.

- *There may be other ways that Medicaid can help. To find out if you or other members of your family qualify for Medicaid, contact the Illinois Department of Public Aid.*

To obtain the locations and telephone numbers of Illinois Department of Public Aid branch offices near you, call (800)-252-8635.

ILLINOIS KIDCARE PROGRAM

The Illinois KidCare Program is a program that provides health insurance coverage to low income children and pregnant woman. KidCare can also help in paying premiums of employer based or private health insurance plans.

- *If a child or pregnant woman does not have insurance then KidCare provides payment of medical expenses at little or no cost. The price that a family pays depends on if your family income qualifies you for KidCare Mom and Babies, KidCare Assist, KidCare Share, or KidCare Premium.*

KidCare Moms and Babies enrolls pregnant woman and infants born to pregnant women who were enrolled in Medicaid. To be eligible, an applicant must have an income equal or less than 200% of the FPL. Enrollees do not pay any cost sharing fees or monthly premiums

KidCare Assist enrolls children from families with income levels less than or equal to 133% of the FPL. Families do not pay any cost sharing fees or monthly premiums.

KidCare Share enrolls children from families with greater than 133% but less than or equal to 150% of the FPL. Families are required to pay a minimal cost-sharing amount for some services up to a cost sharing limit of \$100 but do not pay any monthly premiums.

KidCare Premium enrolls children for families with greater than 150% but less than or equal to 185% of the FPL. Families are required to pay a co-pay amount for each service received up to a co-pay limit of \$100. In addition, families must pay a premium, which is based on the number of children in the child's family.

- *KidCare provides comprehensive coverage to enrollees. This includes doctor and nurse care, immunization and preventative care, health clinic care, laboratory test and x-rays, prescription drugs, medical equipment and medical transportation, dental care, eye care, hospital care, prescriptions, mental health services, and preventative well-child visits, as well as other services.*
- *Families who have employer sponsored or private insurance can receive financial help from KidCare through KidCare Rebate. To be eligible a child's family income must be greater than 133% but equal or less than 185% of FPL. KidCare Rebate will reimburse a family up to \$75 per month for each eligible child.*

ILLINOIS STATE PHARMACEUTICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Beginning in May of 2000, Illinois established the Pharmaceutical Assistance Program to help low-income elderly and disabled residents pay for the pharmaceutical costs associated with specific diseases.

- *Eligibility is based on age and income levels.* If you are disabled, or over the age of 65 and have an income between \$21,218 a year or less (\$28,480 for a couple, or \$35,740 for a three person household) and need prescription for certain diseases then you may be eligible for this program.
- *How much you contribute to the payment depends on your income level.* Enrollees with incomes above the poverty level can obtain prescription medication for covered diseases with a \$3 co-pay. Enrollees living below the poverty level receive prescriptions without a charge.
- *The Pharmaceutical Assistance Program only assists with the payment of certain FDA approved genetic prescriptions associated with certain diseases.* These include Alzheimer's disease, Arthritis, Cancer, Diabetes, Glaucoma, Heart and Blood Pressure Problems, Lung Disease and Smoking Related Illnesses, Osteoporosis and Parkinson's disease.

FOR MORE INFORMATION...

As a summary, this guide will not answer every question for every person in every circumstance. In addition, it is not a substitute for legal advice. If you have more questions, contact the agencies listed below or consult an attorney.

For questions about:	Contact:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual health Insurance • Fully insured group health insurance 	Illinois Department of Insurance Office of Consumer Health Insurance (877) 5274-9431 http://www.state.il.us/ins/
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-insured group health plans • COBRA continuation coverage • Family and Medical Leave Act 	U.S. Department of Labor, Chicago Regional Office for Northern Illinois (312) 353-0900 Or contact U.S. Department of Labor, St. Louis District Office (314) 539-2693 U.S. Department of Labor, Division of Technical Assistance and Inquiries, Washington, D.C. (202) 219-8776 For Department of Labor publications: (800) 998-7542 http://www.dol.gov/dol/pwba
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State Health Benefits Risk Pool 	Illinois Comprehensive Health Insurance Plan (800) 962-8384 http://www.chip.state.il.us
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medicaid 	Illinois Department of Public Aid (800)-252-8635 http://state.il.us/dpa/html/medicaid_program.htm
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Illinois KidCare 	Illinois Department of Public Aid (866)-468-7543 http://www.state.il.us/dpa/kidcare
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pharmaceutical Assistance Program 	Illinois Department of Aging (800) 252-8966 http://www.state.il.us/aging/circtbkr.htm

Finally, if you would like to obtain a consumer guide for a different state, visit the web at <http://www.healthinsuranceinfo.net>

HELPFUL TERMS

Affiliation Period. The time an HMO may require you to wait after you enroll and before your coverage begins. HMOs that require an affiliation period cannot exclude coverage of preexisting conditions under group health plans. Premiums cannot be charged during HMO affiliation periods. See also HMO.

Certificate of Creditable Coverage. A document provided by your health plan that lets you prove that you had coverage under that plan. Certificates of creditable coverage will usually be provided automatically when you leave a health plan. You can obtain certificates at other times as well. See also Creditable Coverage.

CHIP. Illinois Comprehensive Health Insurance Plan, the state-run program for eligible Illinois residents with high health risks (called a state health benefits risk pool). CHIP provides health insurance for those who are federally, and to others with serious health conditions who have been denied individual health coverage by a private health insurance company or would have to personally pay premiums in excess of the applicable CHIP rate.

COBRA. Stands for the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act, a federal law in effect since 1986. COBRA permits you and your dependents to continue in your employer's group health plan after your job ends. If your employer has 20 or more employees, you may be eligible for COBRA continuation coverage when you retire, quit, are fired, or work reduced hours. Continuation coverage also extends to surviving, divorced or separated spouses; dependent children; and children who lose their dependent status under their parent's plan rules. You may choose to continue in the group health plan for a limited time and pay the full premium (including the share your employer used to pay on your behalf). COBRA continuation coverage generally lasts 18 months, or 36 months for dependents in certain circumstances. See also State Continuation Coverage.

Continuous Coverage. Under federal rules, health insurance coverage that is not interrupted by a break of 63 or more days in a row. Employer waiting periods and HMO affiliation periods do not count as gaps in health insurance coverage for the purpose of determining if coverage is continuous. Federal rules apply to you if you are joining a self-insured group health plan. See also Creditable Coverage, Federally Eligible.

Conversion. Your right, when leaving a fully insured group health plan in Illinois, to convert your policy to an individual health plan, if you were continuously insured under the group plan for at least 3 months. You must apply for coverage within 31 days of termination or 15 days after notice of privilege, whichever is later, but no later than 60 days after termination. While conversion policies must offer coverage that meets certain minimum standards, it may not be similar to your former group plan, and may be significantly more expensive. See also Fully Insured Group Health Plan.

Creditable Coverage. Health insurance coverage under any of the following: a group health plan; an individual health plan; Medicare; Medicaid; CHAMPUS (health coverage for military personnel, retirees, and dependents); Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP); Indian Health Service; Peace Corps; or a state health insurance high risk pool. See also Continuous Coverage, Group Health Plan, Individual Health Plan.

Elimination Rider. A feature permitted in individual health plans that permanently excludes coverage for a health condition, body part, or body system.

Enrollment Period. The period during which all employees and their dependents can sign up for coverage under an employer group health plan. Besides permitting workers to elect health benefits when first hired, *many* employers and group health insurers hold an annual enrollment period, during which all employees can enroll in or change their health coverage. See also Group Health Plan, Special Enrollment Period.

Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). A federal law that guarantees up to 12 weeks of job protected leave for certain employees when they need to take time off due to serious illness, to have or adopt a child, or to care for another family member. When you qualify for leave under FMLA, you can continue coverage under your group health plan.

Federally Eligible. Status you attain once you have had 18 months of continuous creditable health coverage. To be federally eligible, you also must have used up any COBRA or state continuation coverage available to you, you must not be eligible for Medicare, Medicaid, or a group health plan, and you must not have other health insurance. In Illinois, you are guaranteed the right to buy coverage through the Illinois Comprehensive Health Insurance Plan if you are federally eligible, but you must apply within 90 days of losing your prior creditable coverage. See also COBRA, Continuous Coverage, Creditable Coverage, State Continuation Coverage.

Fully Insured Group Health Plan. Health insurance purchased by an employer from an insurance company. Fully insured group health plans are regulated by the state of Illinois. See also Self-Insured Group Health Plans.

Genetic Information. Includes information about family history or genetic test results indicating your risk of developing a health condition. A health plan cannot consider preexisting (and exclude coverage for) a condition about which you have genetic information, unless that health condition has been diagnosed by a health professional or unless you voluntarily submit results and the results are favorable to you.

Group Health Plan. Health insurance (usually sponsored by an employer, union or professional association) that covers at least 2 employees.

Guaranteed Issue. A requirement that health plans must permit you to enroll regardless of your health status, age, gender, or other factors that might predict your use of health services. All small group health plans sold to small employers in Illinois are guaranteed issue. Plans that are guaranteed issue can turn you away for other reasons.

Guaranteed Renewability. A feature in health plans that means your coverage cannot be canceled because you get sick. Kassebaum-Kennedy requires all health insurance to be guaranteed renewable. Your coverage can be canceled for other reasons unrelated to your health status.

Health Insurance or Health Plan. In this guide, the term means benefits consisting of medical care (provided directly or through insurance or reimbursement) under any hospital or medical service policy, plan contract, or HMO contract offered by a health insurance company or a group health plan. It does not mean coverage that is limited to accident or disability insurance, workers' compensation insurance, liability insurance (including automobile insurance) for medical expenses, or coverage for on-site medical clinics. Health insurance also does not mean coverage for limited dental or vision benefits to the extent these are provided under a separate policy.

Health Status. When used in this guide, refers to your medical condition (both physical and mental illnesses), claims experience, receipt of health care, medical history, genetic information, evidence of insurability (including conditions arising out of acts of domestic violence), and disability. See also Genetic Information.

HIPAA. The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, better known as Kassebaum-Kennedy, after the two Senators who spearheaded the bill. Passed in 1996 to help people buy and keep health insurance, even when they have serious health conditions, the law sets basic requirements that all health plans must meet. Since states can and have modified and expanded upon these provisions for state regulated health plans (fully insured group and individual plans), consumers' protections vary from state to state.

HMO. Health maintenance organization. A kind of health insurance plan. HMOs usually limit coverage to care from doctors who work for or contract with the HMO. They generally do not require deductibles, but often do charge a small fee, called a co-payment, for services like doctor visits or prescriptions. An HMO may require you to live or work in its service area to be eligible for coverage. If you are covered under an HMO, the HMO might require an affiliation period before coverage begins. See also Affiliation Period.

Illinois Comprehensive Health Insurance Plan. See CHIP.

Individual Health Plan. Policies for people not connected to an employer group. This term also refers to coverage purchased by the self-employed for themselves (or their family members) but for no other employees. Individual health plans are regulated by the state of Illinois.

Kassebaum-Kennedy. See HIPAA.

Large Group Health Plan. One with more than 50 employees.

Late Enrollment. Enrollment in a health plan at a time other than the regular or a special enrollment period. If you are a late enrollee you may be subject to a longer preexisting condition exclusion period. See also Special Enrollment Period.

Look Back Period. The maximum length of time, immediately prior to enrolling in a health plan that can be examined for evidence of preexisting conditions. See also Preexisting Condition.

Managed Care Plan. A kind of health insurance plan. Like an HMO, managed care plans can limit coverage to health care provided by doctors or hospitals who work for or contract with them -- also called "network" providers, and therefore may limit enrollment to those people who live within a particular coverage area. Managed care plans may require you to get permission (a "referral") from your family doctor before you get care from a specialist in their network. Some managed care plans will cover your care at a lower rate if you go to a non-network provider or if you get specialty care without a referral. See also HMO.

Medicaid A program providing comprehensive health insurance coverage and other assistance to certain low-income Medicaid residents. All other states have Medicaid programs, too, though eligibility levels and covered benefits will vary.

Nondiscrimination. A requirement that group health plans not discriminate against you based on your health status. Your coverage under a group health plan cannot be denied or restricted, nor can you be charged a higher premium, due to your health status. Group health plans can restrict your coverage based on other factors (such as part time employment) that are unrelated to health status. See also Group Health Plan, Health Status.

Preexisting Condition (CHIP). Any condition (either physical or mental) for which a diagnosis, care, or treatment was recommended or received within the 6-month period immediately preceding enrollment in a health plan. Pregnancy is not considered a pre-existing condition. Genetic information about your likelihood of developing a disease or condition, without a diagnosis of that disease or condition, cannot be considered a preexisting condition.

Preexisting Condition (Group Health Insurance). Any condition (either physical or mental) for which a diagnosis, care, or treatment was recommended or received within the 6-month period immediately preceding enrollment in a health plan. Pregnancy cannot be counted as a preexisting condition, as long as your group health plan offers maternity benefits. Genetic information about your likelihood of developing a disease or condition, without a diagnosis of that disease or condition, cannot be considered a preexisting condition. Newborns, newly adopted children, and children placed for adoption covered within 30 days cannot be subject to preexisting condition exclusions.

Preexisting Condition (Private Individual Health Insurance). Any condition for which a diagnosis, care or treatment was recommended or received within the 2 year prior to coverage. In addition, if you make a claim during the first 2 years of coverage, your plan can look back 12 months, from the date of your application, for any symptoms or signs that would have prompted a prudent person to seek medical care, or advice. If it finds such evidence, it can apply a 2 year pre-existing exclusion period for that condition.

Preexisting Condition Exclusion Period. The time during which a health plan will not pay for covered care relating to a preexisting condition. See also Preexisting Condition.

Self-Insured Group Health Plans. Plans set up by employers who set aside funds to pay their employees' health claims. Because employers often hire insurance companies to run these plans, they may look to you just like fully insured plans. Employers must disclose in your benefits information whether an insurer is responsible for funding, or for only administering the plan. If the insurer is only administering the plan, it is self-insured. Self-insured plans are regulated by the U.S. Department of Labor, not by the state of Illinois. However, self-insured plans that are also state or local government plans are regulated by the state of Illinois and subject to state law.

Small Group Health Plans. Plans with at least 2 but not more than 50 employees.

Special Enrollment Period. A time, triggered by certain specific events, during which you and your dependents must be permitted to sign up for coverage under a group health plan. Employers and group health insurers must make such a period available to employees and their dependents when their family status changes or when their health insurance status changes. Special enrollment periods must last at least 30 days. Enrollment in a health plan during a special enrollment period is not considered late enrollment. See also Late Enrollment.

Spousal Continuation Coverage. A program where spouses and dependents of divorced, deceased or retired employees, who maintained non-HMO group coverage, may be eligible for a longer period of continuation coverage than provided under COBRA or State Continuation Coverage.. Divorced or widowed spouses under the age of 55 and dependents children are eligible for a maximum of 24 months of continuation coverage. However, divorced spouses and spouses of deceased or retired employees, aged 55 or older, are eligible for continuation coverage until they are eligible for Medicare. See also COBRA, State Continuation Coverage.

State Continuation Coverage. A program similar to COBRA, although COBRA does not apply to employers with fewer than 20 employees. In Illinois, if you are in a fully insured group health plan, you also have rights to continue your health coverage for up to 9 months when your job ends if you have been continuously covered 3 months immediately preceding termination. Continuation does not need to include dental, vision, drugs, disability income or other supplemental benefits that were part of group policy. Continuation ends when you become Medicare eligible, covered by another plan or 9 months after termination would have occurred or upon termination of the group policy, if earlier. See also COBRA, Spousal Continuation Coverage.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI). A program providing cash benefits to certain very low income disabled and elderly individuals. When you qualify for SSI, you generally also qualify for Medicaid. In addition, Medicaid coverage often continues for a limited time if your income increases so that you no longer qualify for SSI.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). A program that provides cash benefits to low income families with children. When you qualify for TANF, you generally also qualify for Medicaid. In addition, Medicaid coverage often continues for a limited time or longer if you no longer qualify for TANF. See also Medicaid.

U.S. Department of Labor. A department of the federal government that regulates employer provided health benefit plans. You may need to contact the Department of Labor if you are in a self-insured group health plan, or if you have questions about COBRA or the Family and Medical Leave Act. See also COBRA, Family and Medical Leave Act.

Waiting Period. The time you may be required to work for an employer before you are eligible for health benefits. Not all employers require waiting periods. Waiting periods do not count as gaps in health insurance for purposes of determining whether coverage is continuous. Waiting periods reduce preexisting condition exclusion periods.