



TIPS

from the Consumer Health Action Network

October 2006

What are medical discount cards? Could they help you?

Medical discount cards promise to save people a lot of money on health care services. They are purchased from a medical discount card organization by paying a one-time enrollment cost and a monthly membership fee. For this, the card companies claim to offer discounts of up to 80% off the full price of doctor visits, hospitalizations, surgery, tests and other medical services. Discounts are not guaranteed and may be less than you can get by just asking. Check with your doctor or other health care provider to be sure the card is a good value.

It is important to understand that these cards are **NOT** insurance – the card companies pay no claims but only offer discounts. You must pay your medical bills at the time of service; the card company will not pay any part of the bills.

Where do you buy a medical discount card?

The CT Department of Insurance has licensed 10 organizations to sell medical discount cards – 7 of these organizations offer products to people living in Connecticut. Each organization sells its own product with discounts for many types of health care services (www.ct.gov/cid/cwp/view.asp?a=1267&q=311740 or www.ct.gov/cid). See our table of current medical discount card offerings approved by the state in the table on the next page.

How is CT trying to protect you?

The law in Connecticut says:

- No organization can sell medical discount cards unless they have a license from the CT Insurance Department – check the Insurance Department website to make sure an organization has a license to sell medical discount cards before you buy one (www.ct.gov/cid)!
- Any organization selling medical discount cards must have an Internet web site that lists the up-to-date names and addresses of doctors that will take the discount card – make sure the doctor you want to go to is listed on the organization's web site and will take your discount card!
- Doctors need to decide how much of a discount to give people with medical discount cards when they agree to work with the card company – call your doctor before your visit to find out how much your visit will cost with your medical discount card!
- You can cancel a medical discount card up to 30 days after paying for the card. Then the organization has another 30 days to pay back all membership fees (not one-time enrollment fees) – write down dates and names of people you talk to at the company if you decide to cancel your medical discount card!

Medical discount card plans currently approved by the CT Dept. of Insurance

	Alliance Healthcard Gold Card	Alliance Healthcard Platinum Card	Ameriplan Corp. Dental Card	Amerimark Direct Passport to Health	Assoc. of Healthcare Management Family Care Card	CAREington International Corporation	Group Dental Services	New Benefits Ltd.
Services Covered								
Physicians/ Specialists		x			x	x		
Prescription Drugs	x	x	x		x	x		
Dental	x	x	x			x	x	
Vision	x	x	x		x	x		
Hearing	x	x			x	x		
Chiropractic	x	x	x					
Health Club	x	x						
Diabetes Supplies	x	x				x		
Physical Therapy	x	x						
Outpatient testing					x			
Pet Care					x			
Durable Medical Equipment					x			
Podiatry						x		
Discount	10-60%	20-70%	10-80%		up to 80%	10-50%	20-45%	
Membership Fee per Month	\$9.95	\$15.95	\$11.95					
Membership Fee per Year	\$99.95	\$159.95					\$75.00	

What do you do if you have a problem?

If you have a problem with an organization selling medical discount cards, you should tell the CT Insurance Department. The department has a complaint form on their website to help you give them all the information they need (www.ct.gov/cid or 1-800-203-3447). Once you fill out the form correctly and send it in, an examiner will send you a letter saying they got your complaint and someone is looking over it. Your letter will also have a File Number that is important for any questions you have about your complaint. Next, the examiner will send a copy of your problem to the medical discount card organization. Finally, the examiner will decide how to solve your problem.

If you have any questions or problems with medical discount card companies, or the Dept. of Insurance, call us toll-free at 1-888-873-4585.

Bottom Line: Get the facts before you buy a medical discount card.

- Check that the company is approved to offer a plan in Connecticut.
- Check with your doctor or other provider that they take the card and ask what the discount will be.
- Decide if it is worth buying for you and your family.