



**BUSINESS OFFICE**

**ALL AFFILIATES OF METHODIST HEALTH SYSTEM**

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<b>TITLE:</b>	Financial Assistance
<b>ORIGINATION DATE:</b>	04/04
<b>REVIEWED DATE:</b>	06/05, 05/10, 12/10, 03/11, 11/11, 03/12, 10/13, 09/14, 08/15, 09/17, 11/17, 9/18, 11/19
<b>REVISED DATE:</b>	12/17
<b>PURPOSE:</b>	To define eligibility criteria for financial assistance

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**POLICY:**

Methodist Health System is a not for profit healthcare organization guided by a commitment to its mission and core values through compassionate service. It is both the philosophy and practice of each MHS facility and provider that medically necessary healthcare services are available to patients, and those in emergent medical need, without delay and regardless of their ability to pay.

Patients qualifying for MHS financial assistance will receive free or discounted care. The MHS financial assistance policy is intended to be compliant with applicable federal and state laws. Financial assistance provided under this policy is done so with the expectation that patients will cooperate with the policy's application procedures and those of public benefit or coverage programs that may be available to cover the cost of care. MHS will not discriminate on the basis of age, sex, race, creed, color, disability, sexual orientation, national origin, or immigration status when making financial assistance determinations.

**PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this policy is to outline the circumstances under which financial assistance may be provided to qualifying patients for medically necessary and emergency healthcare services provided at facilities or by providers that are a part of the Nebraska Methodist Health System D/B/A Methodist Health System (MHS).

**DEFINITIONS:**

*The following definitions are applicable to all sections of this policy.*

**Amount Generally Billed or AGB:** The amount generally billed is the expected payment from patients, or a patient's guarantor, eligible for financial assistance prior to the application of any additional discount granted under this policy. This amount is equal to the rate of average payment received retrospectively from Medicare and private health insurers, including all patient responsibility, calculated as further described in this policy.

**Application Period:** The application period is the later of 240 days after the date of the first post-discharge statement or not less than 30 days after the date MHS provides the patient the requisite final notice to commence extraordinary collection actions ("ECAs") under the Billing and Collection Policy.

**Assets:** Certain assets will be considered in making a determination of eligibility for financial assistance. Assets include bank accounts, CD's, investment accounts, real estate (excluding primary residence) and miscellaneous other assets. Retirement fund assets are not considered to be part of assets.

**Discounted Care:** Financial assistance that provides a percentage discount off of the AGB for eligible medical services, based on a sliding scale, for eligible patients, or patient guarantors, with annualized family incomes between 200-400% of the Federal Poverty Level.

**Emergency Medical Condition:** As defined in Section 1867 of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1395dd), the term “emergency medical condition” means:

- (1) a medical condition manifesting itself by acute symptoms of sufficient severity (including severe pain) such that the absence of immediate medical attention could reasonably be expected to result in—
- placing the health of the individual (or, with respect to a pregnant woman, the health of the woman or her unborn child) in serious jeopardy,
  - serious impairment to bodily functions, or
  - serious dysfunction of any bodily organ or part; or
- with respect to a pregnant woman who is having contractions—
- that there is inadequate time to effect a safe transfer to another hospital before delivery, or
  - that transfer may pose a threat to the health or safety of the woman or the unborn child.

**Family:** As defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, a group of two or more people who reside together and who are related by birth, marriage, or adoption. If a patient claims someone as a dependent on their income tax return, according to the Internal Revenue Service rules, they may be considered a dependent for the purpose of determining eligibility for this policy.

**Family Assets:** An applicant’s family assets are the combined assets of all adult members of the family living in the household.

**Family Income:** An applicant’s family income is the combined gross income of all adult members of the family living in the household and included on the most recent federal tax return. For patients under 18 years of age, family income includes that of the parents and/or step-parents, or caretaker relatives.

**Federal Poverty Level:** The Federal Poverty Level (FPL) uses income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is in poverty in the United States. It is updated periodically in the Federal Register by the United States Department of Health and Human Services under authority of subsection (2) of Section 9902 of Title 42 of the United States Code. Current FPL guidelines can be referenced at <http://aspe.hhs.gov/POVERTY/>

**Financial Assistance:** Assistance provided to eligible patients, who would otherwise experience financial hardship, to relieve them of all or part of their financial obligation for medically necessary or emergent care provided by MHS as determined under this policy.

**Free Care:** A 100% waiver of patient financial obligation resulting from eligible medical services provided by MHS for eligible patients, or their guarantors, with annualized family incomes at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, *provided, however, that patients who satisfy the FPL threshold but have Family Assets in excess of 600% of the FPL do not qualify for Full Free Care.*

**Guarantor:** An individual other than the patient who is responsible for payment of the patient’s bill.

**Gross charges:** Total charges at the full established rate for the provision of patient care services before deductions from revenue are applied.

**Medical Hardship:** Financial assistance provided to eligible patients with annualized family incomes in excess of 400% of the Federal Poverty Level and financial obligations resulting from eligible medical services provided by MHS, and other healthcare providers, in excess of 25% of the greater of family income or family assets.

**Medically Necessary:** As defined by the State Medicaid programs in Nebraska and Iowa, as services or supplies which are medically appropriate and necessary to meet basic health needs consistent with the diagnosis of the patient's condition. Treatment should be in accordance with standards of good medical practice with demonstrated value and consistent in type, frequency and duration with scientifically based guidelines of national medical research or healthcare coverage organizations or governmental agencies. Treatment to be required to meet the medical need of the patient for reasons other than convenience of the patient or the patient's practitioner or caregiver. Treatment is to be rendered in the most cost-efficient manner and type of setting appropriate for the delivery of the covered service within a proper balance of safety, effectiveness and efficiency.

**Payment Plan:** An extended payment plan that is agreed to by both MHS and a patient, or patient's guarantor, for out-of-pocket fees. The payment plan shall take into account the patient's financial circumstances, the amount owed, and any prior payments.

**Qualification Period:** Applicants determined eligible for financial assistance will be granted assistance for a period of six months; provided, however that eligible patients will be provided an additional opportunity to apply for greater financial assistance for future bills. Assistance will also be applied retroactively to unpaid bills incurred for eligible medical services that are active within MHS accounts receivable.

**Uninsured Discount:** Patients ineligible for financial assistance under other financial assistance categories and having no third-party coverage for emergency or medically necessary services provided by MHS will be granted a discount such that the total obligation of the patient is equal to the AGB.

**Underinsured Patient:** An individual, with private or public insurance coverage, that (i) does not provide coverage for medically necessary or emergency services, (ii) has exceeded the maximum liability under his/her insurance coverage, or (iii) has a copay or deductible assessed under the patient's insurance contract for whom it would be a financial hardship to fully pay the expected out-of-pocket expenses for medical services provided by MHS.

**Uninsured Patient:** A patient with no third-party coverage provided through a commercial third-party insurer, an ERISA plan, a Federal Health Care Program (including without limitation Medicare, Medicaid, SCHIP, and Tricare,) Worker's Compensation, or other third party assistance to assist with meeting a patient's payment obligations.

#### **Eligibility Criteria:**

Financial assistance for eligible services will be extended to uninsured and underinsured patients, or a patient's guarantor, or those who are subject to medical hardship in accordance with MHS policy. Eligibility will be considered for those individuals who are unable to pay for their care; it will be based on a combination of family income, assets, and medical obligations.

Financial assistance will be extended to patients, or a patient's guarantor, based on financial need and in compliance with federal and state laws. Financial assistance applicants will be responsible for applying to public programs and pursuing private health insurance coverage. Patients, or patient's guarantors, choosing not to cooperate in applying for programs identified by MHS as possible sources of payment for care, may be denied financial assistance.

In accordance with FEDERAL EMERGENCY MEDICAL TREATMENT AND LABOR ACT (EMTALA) regulations, no patient is to be screened for financial assistance or payment information prior to the rendering of services in emergency situations, nor shall any debt collection activity take place prior to stabilization of any emergency medical condition.

- a. Patients, or patient's guarantors, must cooperate with the application process outlined in this policy to obtain financial assistance. They are expected to contribute to the cost of their care based on their ability to pay, as outlined in this policy.
- b. Financial assistance is typically not available for patient co-payment or balances after insurance when a patient fails to comply reasonably with insurance requirements such as obtaining proper referrals or authorizations. Financial assistance will be offered to underinsured patients providing such assistance is in accordance with insurer's contractual obligations.

***I. Financial Assistance:***

The type of assistance to be provided will be based on a combination of family income, family assets, and medical obligations. The federal poverty level, family income and family assets will be used to determine an applicant's eligibility for financial assistance. Discounts granted to eligible patients under this policy will be taken from Amounts Generally Billed. Eligible applicants may receive the following assistance:

- a. ***Full Free Care:*** The full amount of MHS charges will be determined covered under this financial assistance policy for any uninsured or underinsured patient, or patient guarantor, whose gross family income is at or below 200% of the current federal poverty level; *provided, however, that patients who satisfy the FPL threshold but have Family Assets in excess of 600% of the FPL do not qualify for Full Free Care.*
- b. ***Discounted Care:*** The MHS sliding fee scale will be used to determine the amount eligible for financial assistance for any uninsured or underinsured patient, or patient guarantor, with gross family incomes greater than 200% but at or below 400% of the current federal poverty level after all third party payment possibilities available to the applicant have been exhausted or denied.
  - Discounts will be provided based on the family income of the patient, or the guarantor, according to the following schedule.
  - Family income above 200% FPL but equal to or less than 250% FPL are eligible to receive 80% discount on the patient balance due.
  - Family income above 250% FPL but equal to or less than 300% FPL are eligible to receive 60% discount on the patient balance due.
  - Family income above 300% FPL but equal to or less than 350% FPL are eligible to receive 40% discount on the patient balance due.

- Family income above 350% FPL but equal to or less than 400% FPL are eligible to receive 20% discount on the patient balance due.
  - If the family assets are in excess of 600% FPL, the above discounts will be reduced to 60%, 40%, 20% and 0, respectively.
- c. **Medical Hardship:** Methodist Health System charges are eligible for financial assistance for patients or guarantors with family income greater than 400% of the federal poverty level when circumstances indicate severe financial hardship. Patients, or their guarantors, are eligible for medical hardship assistance if they have incurred out-of-pocket obligations resulting from medical services provided by MHS, as well as other healthcare providers, that exceed 25% of the greater of family income or family assets. Patients, or their guarantors, meeting eligibility criteria for medical hardship will have their MHS charges discounted to an amount equal to 25% of the greater of family income or family assets.
- d. **Uninsured Discount:** Uninsured patients who do not meet the eligibility criteria to receive Full Free Care or Discounted Care or who do not qualify for Medical Hardship will be granted a discount so that the total obligation of the patient is equal to the AGB for the care provided.

## II. Emergency Medical Services:

Methodist Health System will provide individuals requesting [emergency care](#), or those for whom a representative has made a request if the patient is unable, a medical screening [examination](#) to determine whether an emergency medical condition exists. Examination and treatment will not be delayed in order to inquire about methods of payment or insurance coverage, or a patient's citizenship or legal status, nor will debt collection activities be permitted while an emergency medical condition exists.

Methodist Health System will treat an individual with an emergency medical condition until the condition is resolved or stabilized and the patient is able to provide self-care following discharge, or if unable, can receive needed continual care. Inpatient care will be provided at an equal level for all patients, regardless of ability to pay. No patient with an emergency medical condition will be discharged prior to stabilization if the patient's insurance is canceled or otherwise discontinues payment during course of stay.

If MHS does not have the capability to treat the emergency medical condition, it will make an appropriate transfer of the patient to another hospital with such capability.

## III. AMOUNTS BILLED TO PATIENTS ELIGIBLE FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE:

Methodist Health System has elected to use the look-back method in determining the amount generally billed (AGB). Under this method MHS calculates the percentage discount annually on allowed claims for emergency and other medically necessary care provided to patients covered by Medicare and private health insurers including all patient responsibility over a twelve month period at each MHS

hospital. For purposes of this policy, each new AGB will be implemented within 120 days of the 12 month period used by MHS to calculate the AGB for each MHS hospital. Patients determined eligible for financial assistance will not be expected to pay gross charges for eligible services covered under MHS financial assistance policy and will not be charged more than AGB.

To obtain each MHS hospital's most current AGB and a description of the calculation in writing free of charge, see section IX – Applying for Financial Assistance for the appropriate contact information.

*Example:*

Gross Charges incurred from visit to Emergency Department:	\$200.00
AGB discount	(\$100.00)
Net amount due from patient, for patient obligation	\$100.00
40% financial assistance discount (income @ 300% of FPL)	<u>(\$ 40.00)</u>
Due from patient	<u>\$ 60.00</u>

#### **IV. Applying for Financial Assistance:**

Eligibility determinations for financial assistance will be based on this policy and an assessment of the applicant's financial circumstances and need based on information provided in the financial assistance application or other information as further described in this policy. Patients will be informed of the financial assistance policy and the process for submitting an application. Applications for financial assistance may be submitted through the end of the Application Period. Patients, or patient guarantors, have a responsibility to cooperate in applying for financial assistance by providing information on family size and documentation of family income and family assets as required in the financial assistance application.

Methodist Health System will make reasonable effort to explain the benefits of Medicaid and other available public and private coverage programs to patients, or a patient's guarantors. The MHS will take steps to help patients, or patient guarantors, apply for programs that may assist them in obtaining and paying for healthcare services.

Patients identified as potentially eligible will be expected to apply for such programs; those patients choosing not to cooperate in applying for programs may be denied financial assistance.

In the case of incomplete applications, MHS will not process the application and any extraordinary collection actions will be suspended. The applicant will be notified in writing of all required information or documentation to complete the application. The applicant will be informed that this information must be received within 30 days of the date the notification was postmarked. The written notice will include the contact information (telephone number, and physical location of the office) of patient financial assistance. If the applicant does not respond with the information needed to complete the application within the 30 day timeframe, the application will not be processed and ECAs may resume; provided, however, that if the patient submits a completed application prior to the end of the Application Period, MHS will accept and process the application as complete.

To obtain a copy of this policy, a plain language summary of this policy, and a financial assistance application free of charge, see the appropriate contact information at the end of this section. MHS will also offer a copy of the plain language summary to patients upon admission or discharge from an MHS hospital facility. Information on the MHS financial assistance policy will be communicated to patients in

easy-to-understand, culturally appropriate language, and in the primary language spoken by the lessor of 1,000 or 5% of the residents in communities comprising the MHS service area.

*a. Documentation:*

Eligibility for financial assistance shall be based on financial need at the time of application. In general, documentation is required to support an application for financial assistance. To be considered "complete" a financial assistance application must provide all information requested on the form and in the instructions to the form, including the following:

Income documentation includes:

- 1.) Copy of the tax return from the most recent tax year including all schedules, W-2s, and 1099s.
- 2.) A copy of the most recent pay stub.
- 3.) If social security income: a copy of check or a copy of bank statement showing the most recent social security deposit.
- 4.) If unemployed: verification of any compensation received. Example: unemployment compensation, workers compensation

Asset information: Applicants will also be asked to provide information on monetary assets such as checking accounts, savings or money market accounts, certificates of deposits, non-retirement investment accounts as well as real estate other than the primary residence and other assets.

Certain income documentation requirements may not be required for encounter balances under \$2,000.

Free of charge, patients may obtain a current list of providers who are and are not subject to this policy. Patients may also obtain each MHS hospital's most current AGB and a description of the calculation at no charge. In addition, patients may obtain a copy of this policy, a plain language summary of this policy, and a financial assistance application free of charge. Patients may obtain any or all of the above (i) by contacting the MHS Financial Assistance Department at 402-354-4230 or 888-485-4494; (ii) by request in person at the Financial Assistance Department at 825 South 169<sup>th</sup> Omaha, NE 68118, or the emergency room front desk or the admissions desk at any MHS facility; or (iii) by download at [www.bestcare.org/FinancialAssistance](http://www.bestcare.org/FinancialAssistance).

Financial assistance applications are to be submitted to the following office:

**Methodist Health System**

**Financial Assistance**

**825 South 169th**

**Omaha, NE 68118**

**402-354-4230 or 888-485-4494**

**[www.bestcare.org/tools/Financial-Assistance](http://www.bestcare.org/tools/Financial-Assistance)**

**X. Qualification Period:**

Completed requests for financial assistance shall be promptly processed and applicants will be notified within 30 days of receipt of a completed application. If eligibility is approved, MHS will grant financial assistance for a period of six months. Financial assistance shall also be applied to unpaid bills incurred for eligible services that are still within the Application Period. If a patient is eligible for financial assistance other than free care, MHS will:

1. Provide the patient with a revised bill setting forth: (i) the amount the patient owes for care provided after financial assistance, (ii) how the revised amount was determined; and (iii) either the AGB for the care provided or instructions on how the patient can obtain information regarding the AGB for the care provided;
2. Provide the patient with a refund for any amount the patient has paid in excess of the amount owed (unless such amount is less than \$5); and
3. Take reasonable measures to reverse any ECAs taken against the patient. If the patient is determined to be ineligible for financial assistance, MHS will provide the patient with a written notice denying the application that includes the basis for the determination. No patient shall be denied assistance based on failure to provide information or documentation not required in the application. If denied financial assistance, the patient or patient's guarantor, may re-apply at any time there has been a change of income or status.

#### ***XI. Presumptive Eligibility:***

Methodist Health System understands that not all patients are able to complete a financial assistance application or comply with requests for documentation. There may be instances under which a patient's qualification for financial assistance is established without completing the formal financial assistance application. Other information may be utilized by MHS to determine whether a patient's account is uncollectible and this information will be used to determine presumptive eligibility. Such information will only be used to grant, not deny, financial assistance.

Presumptive eligibility may be granted to patients based on their eligibility for other programs or life circumstances such as:

1. homelessness or receipt of care from a homeless clinic or shelter;
2. patient deceased with no known estate;
3. Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program;
4. SNAP benefits (Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, (formerly known as Food Stamps) as proof of need, and are therefore presumptively eligible).

For patients who are non-responsive to the MHS application process, information from other sources may be used to make an informed decision on the financial need of non-responsive patients. The purpose of using this information is to make the best estimate available in the absence of information provided directly by the patient.

The MHS utilizes a presumptive eligibility analytics solution that examines historical data combined with household economic information. It evaluates accounts based on the following standards: available household income, household size, capacity to make payment, and over-extension compared to federal poverty guidelines. The analytics solution uses socioeconomic data from numerous sources including

Census data. Using this presumptive eligibility approach, a score is assigned at the individual patient level. The score enables Patient Financial Services to meet internal processing requirements while providing a community benefit through forgiving account balances for those in need. This approach enables MHS to evaluate accounts for financial assistance equally, regardless of the patient's ability to complete an application for assistance.

When the presumptive eligibility solution is the basis for determining eligibility, a full free care discount will be granted for eligible services for retrospective dates of service only. These accounts will not be sent to collection and will not be included in bad debt expense. Presumptive eligibility solution will not be used to provide financial assistance other than free care.

In the event a patient does not qualify under the presumptive rule set, the patient may still be considered under the traditional financial assistance application process.

#### ***XII. Appeals and Dispute Resolutions:***

Applicants denied financial assistance may appeal the determination in writing by providing information on the reason for the appeal and any relevant information. An appeal letter must be received within 30 days of the date of the determination letter.

Disputes and appeals may be filed by contacting:

**Methodist Health System**  
**Financial Assistance**  
**825 South 169th**  
**Omaha, NE 68118**  
**402-354-4230 or 888-485-4494**  
[www.bestcare.org/tools/Financial-Assistance](http://www.bestcare.org/tools/Financial-Assistance)

The appeal will be reviewed and a written decision provided to the patient within 30 days of receiving a completed, written appeal.

#### ***XIII. Notification:***

Information on financial assistance will be available to patients and the community served by MHS. The MHS financial assistance policy, application and a plain language summary of the policy will be available on the system's website.

Financial assistance information will also be provided in the patient admission information package. Information on the MHS financial assistance policy and instructions on how to contact MHS for assistance and further information will be posted in hospital and physician clinic admitting and registration locations, as well as the hospital(s) emergency departments. A statement regarding financial assistance information will also be included in patient statements.

Information on financial assistance, and the notice posted in hospital and physician clinic locations will be in English, Spanish and in any other language that is the primary language spoken by the lessor of 1,000 or 5% of the residents in the service area.

A request for financial assistance may be made by the patient, a patient's guarantor, a family member, close friend, or associate of the patient, subject to applicable privacy laws. The MHS will respond to oral or written requests for more information on the financial assistance policy made by a patient or any

interested party. Any MHS staff member may make a referral of a patient to a financial counselor to examine eligibility for financial assistance.

The MHS will distribute informational materials on the financial assistance policy to agencies and non-profit organizations serving the low-income population in the particular hospital or clinic service area.

**XIV. *Regulatory Requirements:***

Methodist Health System will comply with all federal, state and local laws, rules and regulations and reporting requirements that may apply to activities conducted pursuant to this policy. This policy requires that MHS track financial assistance provided to ensure accurate reporting. Information on financial assistance provided under this policy will be reported annually on the IRS Form 990 Schedule H.

**XV. *Record Keeping:***

Methodist Health System will document all financial assistance in order to maintain proper controls and meet all internal and external compliance requirements.

**XVI. *Collection Actions***

For further information on the actions MHS may take in the event of non-payment, please see the MHS Billing and Collection Policy. Patients may obtain the Billing and Collection Policy free of charge (i) by contacting the MHS Financial Assistance Department at 402-354-4230 or 888-485-4494; (ii) by request in person at the Financial Assistance Department at 825 South 169th Omaha, NE 68118, or the emergency room front desk or the admissions desk at any MHS facility; or (iii) by download at [www.bestcare.org/tools/Billing-and-Insurance](http://www.bestcare.org/tools/Billing-and-Insurance).

**XVII. *Policy Approval:*** This policy was approved by the MHS Audit Committee on September 12, 2017 and the MHS Board of Directors on October 26, 2017. The MHS financial assistance policy is subject to periodic review. Significant changes to the policy must be approved by the MHS Board of Directors (or designated committee).

Owner: Cindy Haas

Approved by: Scott Volentine



**POLICY/PROCEDURE APPROVAL SHEET**

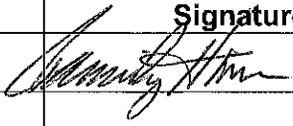
<b>Policy/Procedure Title</b>	<b>New</b>	<b>Revised</b>	<b>Archived</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Financial Assistance Policy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

<b>Affected Affiliates</b>	<b>Affected Departments</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Methodist Jennie Edmundson <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MHS Corporate Offices <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Methodist Hospital <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Methodist Physicians Clinic <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Methodist Women's Hospital <input type="checkbox"/> Nebraska Methodist College <input type="checkbox"/> Shared Service Systems	

<b>Suggested Keywords</b> (submit a minimum of 3)	Financial, assistance, financial assistance policy
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**Required signatures for approval:**

- Nursing - Owner and Chief Nursing Officer or Director of Nursing for each affiliate.
- System wide - Owner and Department head or Vice President for each affiliate.
- Additional signatures for approval may be included as needed

<b>Position</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
Business Office Manager	Cindy Haas		2-8-18

\_\_\_\_\_ **Review Critical Elements (if appropriate) – contact Learning Center with questions/changes**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Infection Control Practice Review – forward to IC for review if needed**

Date placed on Intranet: