



INDEPENDENT WEALTH MANAGEMENT

How Do I Pay for Health Care Costs While Living or Traveling Abroad?

Description:

What Americans living, working, or traveling abroad need to know about financing health care in a foreign country.

Body:

Generally speaking, public and private health insurance plans in the United States -- including Medicare and most private policies -- only pay for treatment and services provided to individuals while they are in this country. Therefore, as an American living, working, or traveling outside of the United States, you will typically be required to pay for any health care costs you incur while abroad.

Even though officials from a U.S. consulate may be able to help you by locating medical services, by informing family or friends of your predicament, and by assisting in the transfer of funds from the United States, the payment of all expenses remains your responsibility. (There are exceptions, however. For workers posted to a non-U.S. location, for example, insurance provided through employers usually does cover overseas medical costs.)

With that in mind, it's almost always a good idea to purchase a special health insurance policy before you depart that will cover you during your travels -- especially if you have a serious pre-existing condition (diabetes, HIV, etc.). A travel agent or insurance agent can help you find one that fits your time frame. For example, short-term health insurance policies for international travelers are available to cover brief trips overseas.

Without insurance, the financial implications of incurring health care costs in a foreign country can be significant. For example, a patient who undergoes major surgery and spends several weeks in intensive care in Mexico could receive a hospital bill for \$30,000 or more. And a subsequent medical evacuation back to the United States could cost nearly as much.

Remember, too, that moving to a country with universal health coverage does not necessarily mean you will be immediately eligible for such coverage. In Canada, for example, you must be a legal resident of that country in order to fully benefit from its national health care system.

Although most trips abroad end without a visit to a doctor's office or hospital emergency room, purchasing a health insurance policy to cover you during overseas travel could end up saving you thousands of dollars in unexpected expenses.

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