

The 2024 Ultimate
HealthShare Guide

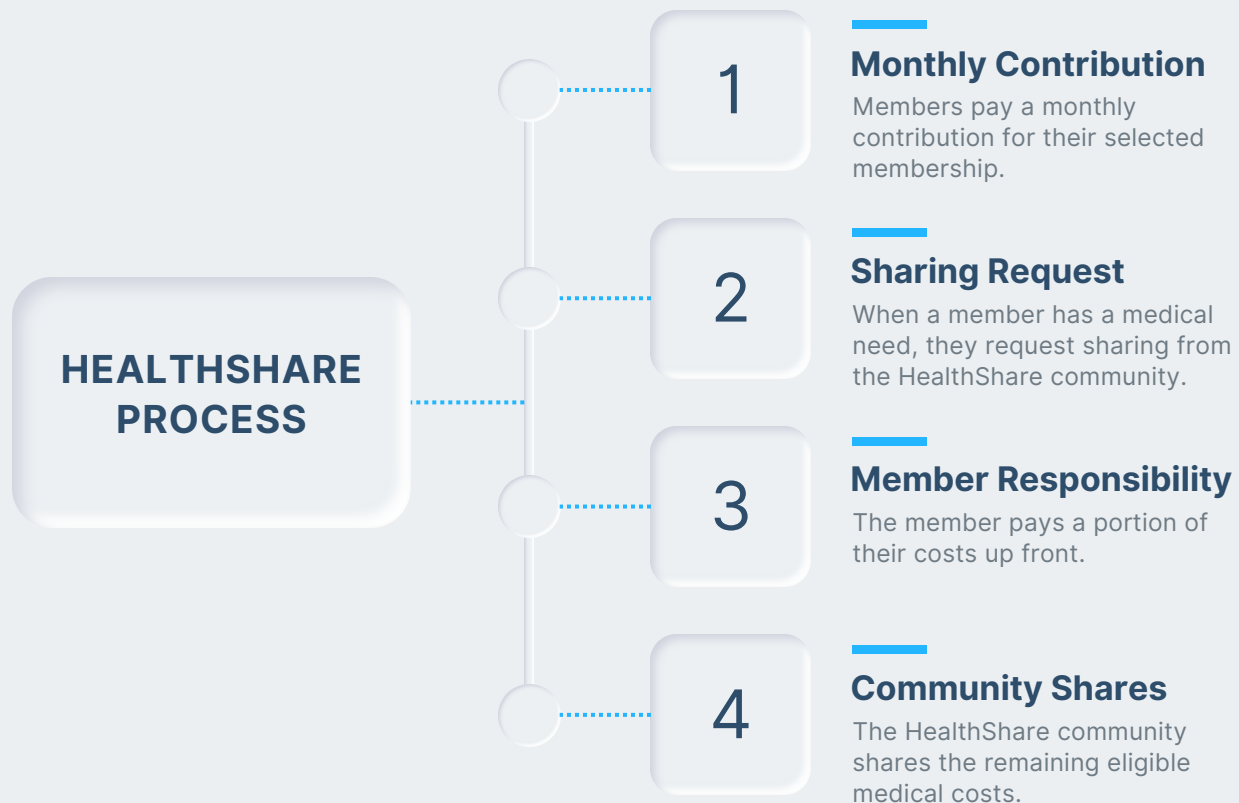


HealthShares & Medical Cost Sharing

Health sharing, often referred to as medical cost sharing, is an alternative model to traditional health insurance. Instead of an insurance company covering the medical costs, health sharing is a system where people join together to help pay for one another's large medical bills. These communities are managed by the HealthShare organizations, and members typically agree to follow a set of shared beliefs, lifestyles, and guidelines.

While one might be inclined to compare HealthShares and insurance, they are anything but apples to apples. They have different costs, ways of working, and types of medical needs they help with.

One substantial difference is that monthly payments for HealthShares can be much less than typical monthly insurance premiums. This is because they often focus on sharing larger medical bills and might not share smaller, everyday medical costs or some pre-existing conditions. It may sound less appealing to have to cover the more predictable costs yourself, but the results are in, and HealthShare members end up saving an average of 50% on their healthcare costs each year.



The History of HealthShares

The first modern HealthShare organization was founded in Ohio in 1981 after a religious community came together to help pay for the medical bills of their pastor. The system worked so well that they decided to standardize this framework to create Christian Healthcare Ministries, the original HealthShare. Since then, different communities have taken this idea and adjusted it to fit their community values.

While these organizations started out as programs for unexpected expenses, medical cost sharing has become a popular alternative to traditional healthcare strategies—especially as insurance continues to become more complicated and expensive.

The passage of the Affordable Care Act in 2010 was a major turning point in highlighting the cost-effective nature of health sharing. The ACA included a provision that exempted members of recognized HealthShares (known as Health Care Sharing Ministries or HCSMs) from the individual mandate penalty. This exemption not only legitimized HCSMs but also made them an attractive option for those seeking alternatives to traditional insurance.

Despite the fact that the federal individual mandate is no longer enforced, HealthShare membership has been increasing dramatically ever since.





Growing Concerns about Health Insurance in 2024

Affordable health coverage remains a pressing concern for American families. A recent study highlighted that a significant portion of Americans believe they pay too much relative to the quality of healthcare they receive. This sentiment has been growing steadily, indicating some deep-rooted issues in the healthcare system.

The financial burden of health insurance on Americans has been escalating. With the rise of insurance premiums, coupled with high deductibles and out-of-pocket maximums, many are grappling with exorbitant monthly costs. Even those with insurance aren't immune to these financial strains, especially during significant medical events. Recent data reveals that in 2023, the average annual premium for family coverage reached \$22,463. This represents a substantial increase over the past decade, further highlighting the urgency of the situation.

Looking into 2024, several factors are expected to contribute to further healthcare-related strain on families. A notable increase in health insurance premiums is anticipated, with a median rise of 6% across 320 insurers in all states. Additionally, the ripple effects of broader economic inflation are expected to permeate the healthcare sector, adding to the upward trajectory of premiums. Shifts in Medicaid enrollment patterns in 2023 could see more people turning to the ACA marketplace in 2024, potentially influencing premium structures even further. These factors collectively underscore the many challenges and uncertainties surrounding healthcare financing in the coming year.

Visit healthshareguide.org to discover your options.

Benefits of HealthShare Membership

HealthShares offer more than just a different approach to healthcare cost management. Membership provides a variety of advantages, including lower costs, community support, and peace of mind.

Lower monthly costs

One of the biggest attractions to HealthShare membership is the affordability factor. Even though members may be responsible for some of their less expensive medical costs, the lower monthly rates of HealthShare membership can make the switch worth it financially. Members often report saving up to 50% compared to traditional insurance premiums.

Community support

HealthShares foster a sense of community among members, who share not just medical costs but also values. This community aspect can provide emotional and spiritual support and encouragement in a time of health crisis. This makes HealthShare membership a more personal experience than dealing with traditional insurance.

Peace of mind

Members have more direct involvement in their healthcare decisions and they know that their contributions will be spent on needs that align with their personal values.

Additionally, a HealthShare membership provides support for the kind of unforeseen, costly medical expenses that keep consumers up at night. Indeed, HealthShares can help protect members from tremendous financial strain.



Key HealthShare Features

HealthShares stand out with their unique blend of features tailored to meet diverse healthcare needs. Some key features to look for in 2024 are preventive care, no provider networks, and maternity care sharing.

Preventive screening

HealthShares, although not typically focused on preventive care, often include some coverage for preventive services. A crucial aspect of this area of care is health screenings, which are instrumental in early detection of serious conditions like cancer. Many HealthShares include preventive screenings like mammograms and both colonoscopies and Cologuard® tests. Some include these services as early as age 40.

Open network

Being tied to a provider network can diminish the flexibility that's typically associated with HealthShares. Fortunately, a growing number of HealthShares are distancing themselves from these restrictive networks. Instead, they're empowering members with the freedom to choose their healthcare providers. Notably, top HealthShares like Zion HealthShare, Impact Health Sharing, and Samaritan Ministries have embraced this open network philosophy.

Maternity care

HealthShares present an appealing, cost-effective option for families and those planning to expand or start one. Maternity care, a significant expense for families, is often shareable under many HealthShare memberships. Usually, maternity costs are eligible for sharing only if the pregnancy occurs after joining the HealthShare, and maternity expenses are generally eligible for sharing about 60 days after membership starts.

Some HealthShares will even share in adoption expenses as though they were related to a maternity need.



The Top HealthShares in 2024



Zion HealthShare continues to stand out as one of the top-rated and fastest growing HealthShares out there, having built a community of nearly 50,000 in just five years.

Zion HealthShare offers two types of memberships, Direct and Essential. Every member of Zion HealthShare benefits from the Additional Giving Fund, designed to cover medical costs that typically wouldn't be eligible for sharing. This feature comes standard with all memberships without any extra monthly fee. Depending on their specific membership details, members of Zion HealthShare can also utilize preventive sharing, telemedicine, and mental wellness services.

Zion HealthShare places a strong emphasis on preventive care, routine checkups, screenings, and vaccinations. This focus on proactive care is atypical for the industry, making Zion HealthShare an industry leader in this respect. Their proactive approach encourages a healthy lifestyle and helps ensure that potential health issues are identified and addressed early, generally leading to better health outcomes and reduced medical costs. Zion HealthShare is one of the few organizations that shares in annual mammograms starting as early as age 40, a noteworthy feature in the industry.

Given their cost-effectiveness, straightforward approach, and well-rounded features, Zion HealthShare remains a top choice for HealthShare Guide moving into 2024.

Key Features

- Annual Wellness Visits
- Mental Health Support
- Preventive Care as Add-On
- No Annual or Lifetime Sharing Limits
- Inclusive Membership: Open to Members of All Faiths

The Top HealthShares in 2024

Samaritan™ MINISTRIES

Samaritan Ministries holds a unique position as one of the longest-standing healthcare sharing ministries. Per their 2022 report, they boast a generous community of over 284,000 people who collectively share an average of \$30 million per month.

Their commitment to transparency is evident in their open disclosure of administrative and program costs, as well as the fact that over 87% of their contributions directly benefit the community. This principle of transparency extends to the organization's governance, with Samaritan members actively maintaining a presence on their board.

Rooted deeply in Christian values, Samaritan Ministries provides a platform for special prayer requests, offering added spiritual support to their members. They also have provisions for children with disabilities to continue under their parents' membership beyond the age of 26, alleviating financial pressures on affected families. Additionally, Samaritan Ministries encourages medical tourism, covering certain medical expenses incurred while abroad.

Samaritan remains a top choice for prospective members looking for a faith-oriented HealthShare with a tradition of industry excellence.

Key Features

- Transparent Operations
- Medical Tourism Allowed
- Strong Emphasis on Faith
- Long-Standing Reputation
- Continued Sharing for Children with Disabilities over 26

The Top HealthShares in 2024



Impact Health Sharing was founded in 2020 and has quickly established itself as a notable up-and-coming HealthShare. Impact's membership structure is designed with flexibility in mind and puts members first.

All members benefit from a share account, managed by America's Christian Credit Union, which provides transparency on account balances, sharing transaction history, and more. This level of control and transparency is a testament to Impact's commitment to its members.

One of Impact's standout features is its approach to mental health. Members can take advantage of up to five outpatient mental health visits annually. Additionally, senior memberships are available for individuals aged 65 and above with Medicare Parts A & B, offering a lower PRA and no provider fees.

With its recent establishment in 2020 and a growing membership base, Impact Health Sharing is making waves in the HealthShare industry. Their online member portal, emphasis on mental health, and provisions for senior memberships make them a compelling choice for many.

Key Features

- Annual Wellness Visits and Labwork
- Senior Memberships
- Outpatient Mental Health Visits
- Flexible Membership Faith Requirements



TOP 3 HEALTHSHARES: 2024

SIDE-BY-SIDE COMPARISON	ZION	SAMARITAN	IMPACT
MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENTS	Flexible	Religious, Strict	Religious, Flexible
MEMBERSHIP SIZE	50K	280K	10K
COMMUNITY ESTABLISHED	2019	1994	2020
NEED PROCESSING TIME	4-6 Weeks	4-8 Weeks	4-6 Weeks
NEED PROCESSING METHOD	Single-use Credit Card	Account	Account
STARTUP FEE	\$0	\$200	\$79
RENEWAL FEE	\$0	\$0	\$0
ADDITIONAL SHARING	Additional Giving	Save to Share	Extra Impact
MEMBER PORTAL	Yes	Yes	Yes
PROVIDER NETWORK	No	No	No
TELEMEDICINE			
TELEMEDICINE	Yes	Yes	Yes
MENTAL WELLNESS			
MENTAL WELLNESS	Optional	No	Yes
WELLNESS VISIT			
WELLNESS VISIT	Yes	No	Yes
COLONOSCOPY			
COLONOSCOPY	Yes	No	Yes
MAMMOGRAM			
MAMMOGRAM	Yes	No	Yes
MATERNITY			
MATERNITY	Yes	Yes	Yes
HOSPITALIZATION			
HOSPITALIZATION	Yes	Yes	Yes
EMERGENCY			
EMERGENCY	Yes	Yes	Yes
GOOGLE REVIEWS			
GOOGLE REVIEWS	4.6	4.8	4.6
HEALTHSHARING REVIEWS			
HEALTHSHARING REVIEWS	4.8	3.3	N/A
HEALTHSHARE GUIDE			
HEALTHSHARE GUIDE	4.7	4.2	N/A

HealthShares: Common Questions

HealthShares are an effective alternative healthcare solution for many individuals and families. However, they are not always easy to understand and there are many common questions about HealthShares and the HealthShare industry.

Question: Do HealthShares pay for routine expenses?

Answer

HealthShares do not share in too many routine expenses. Some companies will not share in any preventive or routine expenses. A HealthShare membership paired with a Direct Primary Care (DPC) membership is a great strategy for those looking to avoid traditional health insurance, providing for both routine and emergency healthcare needs.

DPC practices allow members to pay a flat subscription fee for their preventive and routine care, usually with minimal (or even no) copay. A DPC helps foster a personal relationship between patient and physician and can keep members healthier overall. A HealthShare membership provides peace of mind when larger expenses arise.

Note: Many HealthShares include telemedicine benefits that allow members free access to virtual office visits.

Question: Are prescriptions covered by most HealthShares?

Answer

No. HealthShares do not “cover” any expenses, they **share** in eligible costs. This distinction is important because it means that a HealthShare is not obligated to pay for anything, rather members voluntarily help each other with eligible expenses as outlined in the member guidelines.

Generally, routine prescription costs are not eligible expenses. However, many companies do offer discount programs that help lower prescription costs. A few companies will share generic prescription costs, and all will share in costs for prescriptions associated with eligible inpatient hospital stays.



Question: Do HealthShares share in pre-existing condition expenses?

Answer

HealthShare organizations operate under different rules than insurance companies, and they are never required to share in any medical expenses. All members should carefully read the guidelines of their chosen HealthShare so they understand what is, and is not, shareable.

Although no HealthShares will share in pre-existing condition expenses at first, many will begin sharing those bills after a waiting period (the average is two years).

The amount eligible for sharing in pre-existing conditions tends to be limited in the beginning, with allowable sharing amounts increasing with every year of membership (some companies will remove all sharing limits after year three or four). When considering a HealthShare, prospective members should carefully consider whether they can afford to wait for sharing through this initial period.

Question: Is it true that HealthShares are not required by law to help members pay for their medical bills?

Answer

It is true that HealthShares are not regulated by insurance laws and are never required to share in medical expenses. However, they are subject to consumer protection laws.

The guidelines for any given HealthShare should clearly explain what is, and is not, considered eligible for sharing. If a sharing ministry goes against its guidelines, they can be reported to a state's consumer protection bureau.

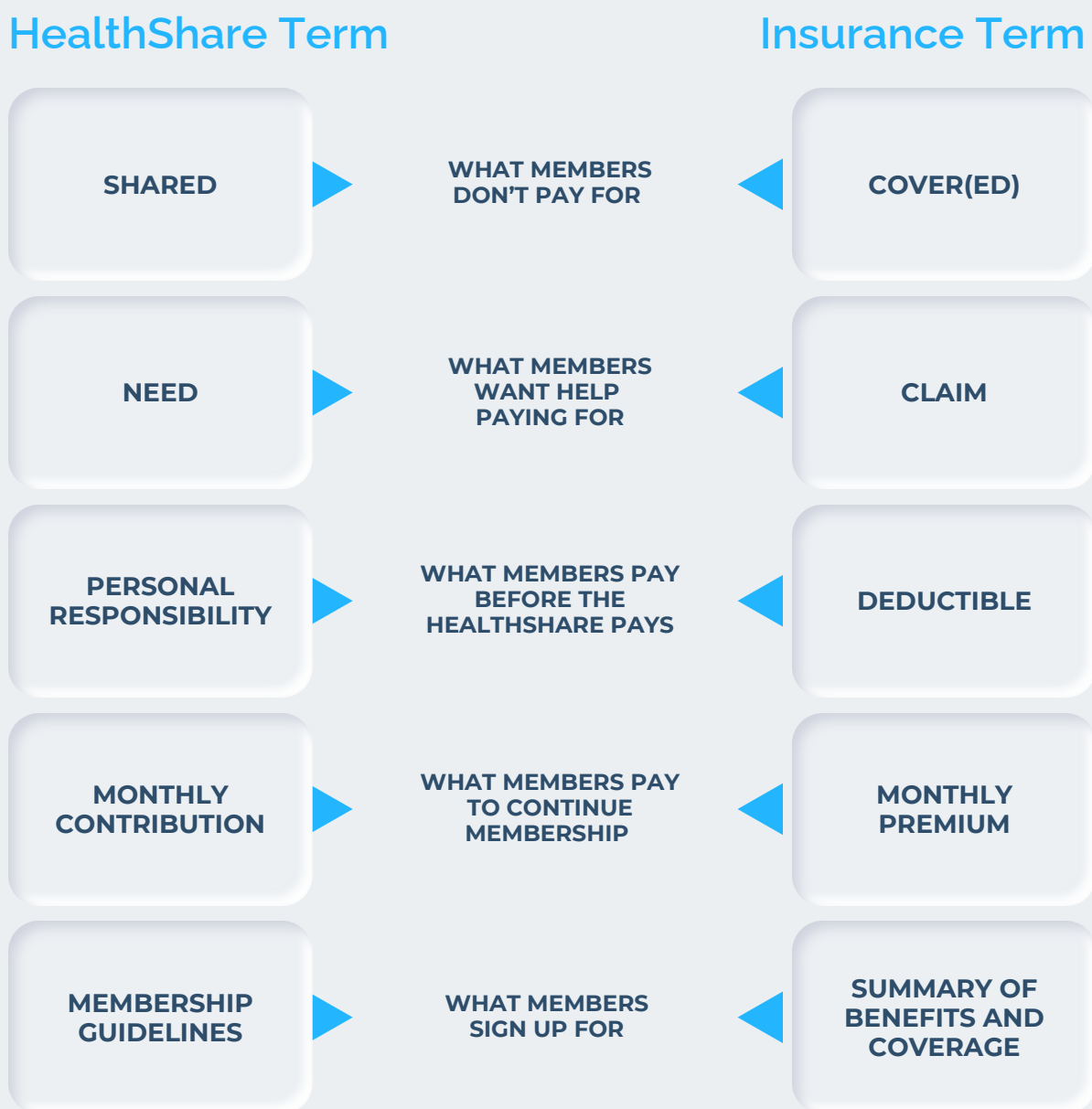
Additionally, keeping members happy is in a HealthShare's best interest. Though most reputable companies are nonprofit organizations, they are still concerned with staying in business, and thus are motivated to hold on to their member base by keeping them happy.



Question: Why don't HealthShares use the same terms that health insurance does?

Answer

Because HealthShares are not insurance, and it is very important that they maintain that distinction. HealthShares and health insurance have a lot in common because they both help people with healthcare expenses. So, it can be confusing to understand the different ways they talk about what they do. The chart below may help explain how the terms used by HealthShares are similar and different from those used by health insurance.



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HealthShares vs.
Health Insurance



The Pros and Cons of Being
a HealthShare Member



HealthShares and
Religious Devotion



What are
HealthShares?



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