

The AMERICAN RETIREMENT ADVISOR

A guidepost to your successful retirement.



Understanding **Faith Based Alternatives For Healthcare**

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Everyone would agree having a method to obtain high quality affordable healthcare is a requirement in modern America. The Affordable Healthcare Act provided healthcare to all American's without disqualification for preexisting conditions, but it was not affordable nor did it allow most folks to maintain their current medical relationships. The insurance companies stated they would lose millions with the act, and the government stated they would be reimbursed for their loss. The government failed to pay the billions of dollars in insurance company losses. The insurance companies were forced to stop offering plans where the premiums did not cover their costs of operations.

So here we are...

Most counties in the United States are with less than three insurance companies' choices. Those Americans that need insurance most, are forced to get a plan without their doctors at costs they cannot possibly afford.

Perhaps we need to look at alternatives! Desperate times call for desperate measures. We cannot endorse any of the faith based ministries enclosed in this guide. But I see no other option for many folks under the age of 65 that need to buy individual health insurance.

What is a faith based health ministry?

According to Wikipedia:

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Health_care_sharing_ministry)

"A health care sharing ministry is an organization that facilitates sharing of health care costs between individual members who have common ethical or religious beliefs in the United States. A health care sharing ministry does not use actuaries, does not accept risk or make guarantees, and does not purchase reinsurance policies on behalf of its members. Members of health care sharing ministries are exempt from the individual responsibility requirements of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, often referred to as Obamacare. This means members of health care sharing ministries are not required to have insurance as outlined in the individual mandate.

According to www.healthcaresharing.org, an alliance of the two largest ministries in the US, over 400,000 Americans participate in health care sharing in 2015, sharing more than \$340 million in medical bills annually. A January 2015 op-ed in the New York Times stated that the four main healthcare ministries in the US have a total combined membership of about 340,000, saying that membership has grown recently because of their exemption to the insurance mandate of the Affordable Care Act. The monthly cost of membership in a health care sharing ministry is generally lower than the cost of insurance rates.

Some of the larger health care sharing ministries are: *(Links and phone numbers included later in article)*

- Christian Healthcare Ministries
- Medi-Share, a program of Christian Care Ministry Samaritan Ministries
- Liberty HealthShare, Gospel Light Mennonite Church Medical Aid Plan, Inc
- MCS Medical Cost Sharing
- Altrua HealthShare

Most ministries are oriented toward practicing Christians, with restrictions like abstaining from sex outside of marriage, excessive drinking, tobacco, and illegal drugs. They usually require members to make a statement of belief as well. For instance Samaritan Ministries requires a statement of Christian faith including belief in the triune God and divinity of Jesus; Liberty HealthShare is more inclusive, accepting members with a wide variety of religious and ethical beliefs. All such ministries require that members subscribe to the ethical principles of individually responsibility for health, and helping others in need.

Tax penalties under the Affordable Care Act

In order for members to be exempt from the tax penalties outlined in the Affordable Care Act, ministries must meet the following qualifications:

- Must be a 501(c)(3) organization
- Members must share common ethical or religious beliefs
- Must not discriminate membership based on state of residence or employment
- Members cannot lose membership due to development of a medical condition
- Must have existed and been in practice continually since December 31, 1999
- Must be subject to an annual audit by an independent CPA which must be publicly available upon request

Four ministries that meet these qualifications are: Christian Healthcare Ministries, Liberty HealthShare, Samaritan Ministries, and Medi-Share. MCS Medical Cost Sharing, founded after 1999, does not meet the qualifications, but offers to pay the tax penalties incurred by members. Altrua HealthShare, though founded in March 2000 three months after the December 1999 cutoff, has been approved as a health sharing ministry that qualifies members for the penalty exemption.

Though federal health care law requires U.S. citizens to have health insurance or a health cost sharing ministry like CHM, you may be interested to know that CHM doesn't have an open enrollment period. You, your spouse, or your dependent children can enroll in CHM anytime during the year

Health care sharing satisfies the Federal health care law's (Affordable Care Act) requirement that individuals purchase insurance or pay a penalty-tax. If people join in the middle of a year however, they may be required to pay a prorated tax-penalty for the months that they and members of their household were not participating in a health care sharing ministry or uninsured.

From the Wall Street Journal:

"The ministries operate outside the insurance system and aren't regulated by states, provide a health-care cost-sharing arrangement among people with similarly held beliefs. Their membership growth has been spurred by an Affordable Care Act provision allowing participants in eligible ministries to avoid fines for not buying insurance.

Ministry officials say they aren't offering insurance, don't guarantee claims will be paid, and don't need to be regulated. The nonprofits are well managed, according to ministry officials, with third-party audits and a sterling history of sharing members' claims."

From our Google search:

www.chministries.org

Christian Healthcare Ministries
127 Hazelwood Ave.
Barberton, OH 44203-1316
800-791-6225
9am-5pm M-F EST

www.mychristiancare.org/medi-share

Medi-Share
P.O. Box 120099
Melbourne, FL 32912
(800) 772-5623

www.samaritanministries.org

Samaritan Ministries
6000 N. Forest Park Drive
Peoria, IL 61614
(877) 764-2426

www.altruahealthshare.org

Altrua HealthShare
PO Box 90849
Austin, TX 78709-0849
1-888-244-3839

www.libertyhealthshare.org

Gospel Light Mennonite Church Medical Aid Plan, Inc
Mailing Address:
4845 Fulton Dr. NW
Canton, Ohio 44718
(855) 585-4237

www.medicalcostsharing.com

Medical Cost Sharing, Inc.
518 Felix Street
Saint Joseph, Missouri 64501
866-826-5316

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