



Health Care in Foster Care and When You Age Out

Taking care of your health is an important part of planning for your future. Here is some helpful information and tips on how to stay healthy:

What health insurance do I have while I am in the child welfare system?

While in care, your health insurance will likely be Medicaid, which covers all necessary medical services, treatment, and equipment until your 21st birthday. This includes:

- Doctors' visits
- Prescriptions
- Mental and behavioral health treatment
- Substance abuse treatment
- Therapy

How do I get health insurance after I leave foster care?

- **If you were in foster care at age 18 or older, live in Pennsylvania, and are under age 26:** you are eligible for free health insurance – Medicaid – until age 26 as a “former foster youth.” You are eligible no matter what your income is. This coverage should be automatic once you leave care after age 18, but you will need to renew your coverage each year. To find out more about how to make sure you are “covered til 26” see www.jlc.org/coveredtil26PA.
- **If you were in foster care at age 18 or older, are still under 26, and do not have health insurance:** you should apply for Medicaid through the COMPASS site at compass.state.pa.us. Make sure you answer that you were in foster care when you were age 18 or older.
- **If you left foster care before age 18 and need health insurance:** you should apply for Medicaid through the COMPASS site at compass.state.pa.us. Although you do not meet the “former foster youth” eligibility criteria, Pennsylvania has expanded its Medicaid program to cover many other young people as well.

Who makes treatment decisions for me when I am in care?

Generally, if you are under 18, the child welfare agency has the ability to consent to your day-to-day medical care and your parents may consent to non-routine care. The court can also order treatment. Once you are over 18, you will be able to consent to all medical, dental and health services even if they are still in the child welfare system.

There are also certain types of treatment you can get without the consent of a parent or guardian if you are under 18 in Pennsylvania, regardless of whether or not you are in foster care:

- **Youth of any age can consent to:**
 - Substance abuse treatment
 - Testing and treatment for all “reportable diseases”
 - Contraception (birth control), pregnancy testing, prenatal care, testing and treatment for Sexually Transmitted Diseases





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- **Youth 14 and older can consent to:** mental health treatment.
- **Youth under 18 who are pregnant can consent to:** all medical treatment, except for abortion.

Who can help me if I am not getting the treatment I need?

Talk to your attorney, caseworker or judge if you feel you are not getting the treatment you need. They can help you get treatment you need or help you to file a grievance or complaint with the state Medicaid agency. You can also contact Pennsylvania Health Law Project for assistance at <http://www.phlp.org/home-page/contact>.

How can I prepare to stay healthy once I am an adult?

- Learn to take care of your health while you are still in care. Ask questions about your health issues or needs, know how to schedule a doctor's appointment, apply for and use health insurance, and fill a prescription. Your caseworker and foster parents should help you learn these skills.
- Ask to review your own health records so you understand your needs and treatment. Ensure that the records in your case file are updated and a copy is provided to you when you leave foster care.
- Make sure your transition plan includes a plan for how you will address your health care and health insurance needs once you age out, along with helpful information like the contact numbers of your treatment providers and people you can call for support or with questions.

What if I have special health care needs that require more treatment and services than my health insurance offers?

If you have a disability that prevents you from working, you may be eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI). To get more information on how SSI can help you with your treatment and service needs, see the Section on Accessing Social Security Income (SSI) in Juvenile Law Center's guide on Transition Planning for Youth with Disabilities from the Child Welfare System to Adulthood, <http://www.jlc.org/transitionguide>. You can also contact the Social Security Administration at (800) 772-1213 or Community Legal Services at (215) 981-3700.

If you have a significant health issue or developmental disability you may be eligible for services and supports through Medicaid Home and Community Based Waivers. For more information, see the Section on Accessing Medicaid Waivers in Juvenile Law Center's guide on Transition Planning for Youth with Disabilities from the Child Welfare System to Adulthood, <http://www.jlc.org/transitionguide>.

Get Help

- For information and referrals, call Juvenile Law Center at 215-625-0551 or visit their website at www.jlc.org
- For information about legal assistance, call Community Legal Services at (215) 981-3700 or Philadelphia Legal Assistance at (215) 981-3800.

