

Buyer Beware: Junk Plans Pose a Danger to People with HIV

*Health insurance will be more expensive than ever in 2026. People vulnerable to premium sticker shock – especially those who rely on premium tax credits to afford insurance in the Affordable Care Act (ACA) marketplace – will be looking for less expensive alternatives. And there will be plenty of options being marketed as “cheap” insurance. But buyers must beware, because plans that **sound too good to be true are just that**: they have low monthly premiums because they are not regulated. These plans don’t provide comprehensive coverage and **often do not cover the care needed by people with HIV.***

What is a “junk” plan?

So-called “junk” insurance plans put people with rare, serious, and complex chronic health conditions, including HIV, at significant risk.¹ Because they do not have to meet the same standards as ACA insurance plans, junk plans can deny coverage for pre-existing conditions, exclude prescription drug coverage, include annual and lifetime limits on care, include geographic limitations, and they can cancel your coverage if you are sick.² It’s these features that enable them to have such low premiums.

Junk Plans are Aggressively (& Deceptively) Marketed

Junk plans are often aggressively and deceptively marketed by insurance agents and brokers, who fail to disclose they receive a commission for the sale of the plan.³ Key words like “Obamacare” or “ACA enroll” may be used to grab attention and mislead an enrollee toward these unregulated, non-comprehensive plans.⁴ Brokers may call people at home or send flyers in the mail. Reputable marketplace navigators can help provide unbiased information about health plans. Healthcare.gov and state-based marketplaces are safe places to ensure a high quality, comprehensive health plan.

Junk Plans Hurt People with HIV

Despite paying monthly premiums, people enrolled in junk plans can often find themselves in precarious medical and financial situations when they seek health care. The junk insurance plan may deny coverage, refuse to pay, or require the sick patient to collect medical records dating back to childhood to prove their condition was not pre-existing. The sticker shock that enrollees may experience when they shop for their 2026 health plan will undoubtedly be overwhelming, but junk plans may end up costing more in the end.

¹ US House of Representatives Committee on Energy and Commerce, Subcommittee on Health, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Shortchanged: How the Trump Administration’s Expansion of Junk Short-term Health Insurance Plans is Putting Americans at Risk, June 2020,

<https://docs.house.gov/meetings/IF/IF14/20210323/111378/HHRG-117-IF14-20210323-SD023.pdf>.

² Partnership to Protect Coverage, Under-Covered: How “Insurance-Like” Products are Leaving Patients Exposed, March 25, 2021, [Under-covered: How “insurance-like” products are leaving patients exposed | Blood Cancer United](#).

³ US Government Accountability Office, Report to Congress, Private Health Coverage: Information on Farm Bureau Health Plans, Health Care Sharing Ministries, and Fixed Indemnity Plans, July 2023, [GAO-23-106034, Accessible Version, PRIVATE HEALTH COVERAGE: Information on Farm Bureau Health Plans, Health Care Sharing Ministries, and Fixed Indemnity Plans](#).

⁴ Justia, *Deceptive Healthcare Practices & Consumers’ Legal Rights*, October 2022,

<https://www.justia.com/consumer/deceptive-practices-and-fraud/deceptive-health-care-practices/>.

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This brief was authored by: Stephanie Hengst and Rachel Klein, The AIDS Institute
