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Mapping State Efforts to Address Medical Debt

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The healthcare affordability crisis has resulted in an **estimated 100 million Americans, or 41% of adults** (<https://kffhealthnews.org/diagnosis-debt/>), holding some form of medical debt. The consequences of medical debt are profound, from **financial strain** (https://files.consumerfinance.gov/f/documents/cfpb_medical-debt-burden-in-the-united-states_report_2022-03.pdf) to **worsened health outcomes** (<https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/surveys/2023/oct/paying-for-it-costs-debt-americans-sicker-poorer-2023-affordability-survey>), as people delay or forgo health services and medications to prevent further debt. Medical debt also has significant health equity implications as there is a **disproportionate impact** (<https://apps.urban.org/features/debt-interactive-map/?type=medical&variable=medcoll>) on those with low incomes, poor health status, and communities of color such as Black and Latino/a populations. This is a **“uniquely American problem** (<https://chw.princeton.edu/news/podcast-only-america-easing-burden-m>

debt),” but fortunately, states are moving to eradicate medical debt for low income residents, which **testimonials show (<https://unduemedicaldebt.org/stories/>)** dramatically improves recipients’ quality of life. At the same time, states are also working to protect residents from the financial consequences of medical debt by prohibiting its inclusion in credit reports. The **Consumer Financial Protection Bureau has proposed a rule** (<https://www.consumerfinance.gov/about-us/newsroom/cfpb-proposes-to-ban-medical-bills-from-credit-reports/>) that would prohibit lenders from considering medical debt information when determining a consumer’s eligibility for credit, and also would keep most medical debt information off consumer reports provided to creditors.

A new ***Health Affairs Forefront* article** (<https://www.healthaffairs.org/content/forefront/growing-policy-wave-medical-debt-cancellation-states-taking-action>) examines the burgeoning trend of state efforts to cancel medical debt for just pennies on the dollar. The map below highlights state action to cancel medical debt and/or prohibit medical debt reporting. For more information on state efforts to address medical debt, see recent **research from the Commonwealth Fund** (<https://www.commonwealthfund.org/blog/2024/states-continue-enact-protections-patients-medical-debt>).

Map updated as of: 8/22/2024

State Efforts to Cancel Medical Debt and Prohibit Medical Debt Reporting

