

Your Rights and Protections Against Surprise Medical Bills

Effective February 1, 2022, when you get emergency care or get treated by an out-of-network provider at an in-network hospital or ambulatory surgical center, you are protected from surprise billing or balance billing.

What is “balance billing” (sometimes called “surprise billing”)?

When you see a doctor or other health care provider, you may owe certain out-of-pocket costs, such as a copayment, coinsurance, and/or a deductible. You may have other costs or have to pay the entire bill if you see a provider or visit a health care facility that isn't in the SFEW Health & Welfare Plan's ("Plan") Preferred Provider Network, currently Blue Shield of California ("Blue Shield").

“Out-of-network” means providers and facilities that haven't signed a contract with the Plan. Out-of-network providers may be permitted to bill you for the difference between what the Plan covers and the full amount charged for a service. This is called “**balance billing.**” This amount is likely more than Blue Shield's in-network costs for the same service and might not count toward your annual out-of-pocket limit.

“Surprise billing” is an unexpected balance bill. This can happen when you can't control who is involved in your care—like when you have an emergency or when you schedule a visit at an in-network facility but are unexpectedly treated by an out-of-network provider.

You are protected from balance billing for:

Emergency services

If you have an emergency medical condition and get emergency services from an out-of-network provider or facility, the most the provider or facility may bill you is the Plan's in-network cost-sharing amount (such as copayments and coinsurance). You **can't** be balance billed for these emergency services. This includes services you may get after you're in stable condition, unless you give written consent and give up your protections not to be balance billed for these post-stabilization services.

Certain services at an in-network hospital or ambulatory surgical center

When you get services from a Blue Shield PPO in-network hospital or ambulatory surgical center, certain providers there may be out-of-network. In these cases, the most those providers may bill you is the Plan's in-network cost-sharing amount. This applies to emergency medicine, anesthesia, pathology, radiology, laboratory, neonatology, assistant surgeon, hospitalist, or intensivist services. These providers **can't** balance bill you and may **not** ask you to give up your protections not to be balance billed.

If you get other services at these in-network facilities, out-of-network providers **can't** balance bill you, unless you give written consent and give up your protections.

You're never required to give up your protections from balance billing. You also aren't required to get care out-of-network. You can choose a provider or facility in the Blue Shield PPO network.

When balance billing isn't allowed, you also have the following protections:

- You are only responsible for paying your share of the cost (like the copayments, coinsurance, and deductibles that you would pay if the provider or facility was in-network). The Plan will pay any additional costs to out-of-network providers and facilities directly.
- The Plan generally will:
 - Cover emergency services without requiring you to get approval for services in advance (prior authorization).
 - Cover emergency services by out-of-network providers.
 - Base what you owe the provider or facility (cost-sharing) on what it would pay an in-network provider or facility and show that amount in your explanation of benefits.
 - Count any amount you pay for emergency services or out-of-network services toward your in-network deductible and out-of-pocket limit.

If you think you've been wrongly billed, you may contact the Department of Health and Human Services at 1-800-985-3059 to submit a complaint regarding potential violations of the No Surprises Act.

Visit <https://www.cms.gov/nosurprises/consumers/consumers> for more information about your rights under federal law.

Visit <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/maps-and-interactives/2021/feb/state-balance-billing-protections> for more information about state laws addressing balance billing. (Note that while state laws may affect state-regulated insurers, the Plan's self-funded indemnity program must comply with federal law.)