The Medical Credit Industry: Insights on Third-Party Financing at U.S. Public Hospitals

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Medical debt impacts up to 41% of Americans, which will likely worsen with increasing health care costs and changes to insurance coverage. Much of this debt is owed to hospitals, and there is a burgeoning financial industry invested in this space. We investigated the landscape of medical debt financing and credit being offered to patients in public hospitals using the information on these hospitals' websites. We found:

- The majority of public hospitals mention some form of financing to help patients cover their bills, including in-house payment plans (481 of 631; 76%).
- About one-quarter (163; 26%) named a third-party product.
- The top companies were CareCredit, AccessOne, ClearBalance, Payzen, CarePayment and HELP Financial.
- States where more than 40% of public hospitals offered third-party products were Wyoming, Nebraska, Missouri, Ohio, North Carolina and South Carolina.
- Nearly half of hospitals with a third-party product (74; 45%) state that the product is interest-free, which can depend on the term length and balance.
- We found 12 hospitals that actually disclose a non-zero interest rate, ranging from 2.5% to 32.99% APR.

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Introduction

As many as 41% of American adults are estimated to have medical debt, with total estimates varying from $88 billion to $220 billion.[1] These debts might be owed directly to health care providers (either immediately or via a payment plan), owed to friends or family who have lent money, owed to a credit card when a patient uses this to pay a bill, or owed specifically to a company with a medical credit product. While these products can help bridge a financial gap for patients and hospitals, they can carry significant financial consequences such as higher total payments for care and increased risk of bankruptcy.[2]

In order to understand who and how these products are presented to patients, we reviewed hospital websites and noted any promotion or mention of third-party medical credit products and the terms they disclosed. Our data includes public hospitals located in 41 states (see Appendix for full methods).

Public hospitals are funded in large part by taxpayer dollars and usually serve as a health care safety net in their communities. Given that these hospitals serve many underinsured or uninsured patients who may be vulnerable to medical debt, it's important to understand whether public hospitals offer financial products to patients and what kind.

Figure 1: Overview of Findings Across US Public Hospitals



Legend note: Any financing includes in-house plans, which have descriptions such as "zero-interest payment plans", "balances must be paid within 12 months", etc. We used a broad definition in our website

[1]Lunna Lopes, et al. "Health Care Debt In The U.S.: The Broad Consequences Of Medical And Dental Bills," KFF, June 16, 2022, accessed October 9, 2026, https://www.kff.org/health-costs/kff-health-care-debt-survey/; Medical Debt Working Group, *Past Due: How Medical Debt Is Harming Americans and the Solutions We Need Now*, The Lown Institute, June 2, 2025, https://lowninstitute.org/reports/past-due-report/.

[2]"CFPB Report Highlights Costly Credit Cards and Loans Pushed on Patients," Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, May 4, 2023, https://www.consumerfinance.gov/archive/newsroom/cfpb-report-highlights-costly-credit-cards-and-loans-pushed-on-patients/.

search (including mentions in Financial Assistance policies, if found), which likely impacts the sensitivity of our search. In other words, we may have missed these payment plans in some hospitals, especially if there was no interest or term descriptions online.

The data set was collected from March through October 2026 (see Appendix for methodology).

Landscape of medical credit offerings

Trends in financing options across states

Available products varied across states (Figure 2). There were 13 states where we found no third-party credit product mentioned on any public hospital websites, including three states where we found no financing mentioned at all. All of New York's 17 public hospitals provide an in-house payment plan.

Six states had a low share of public hospitals with third-party credit products mentioned (fewer than 20%). Tennessee had 13 of its 15 public hospitals offer some in-house payment plans, and only two also mentioned a bank loan. Of California's 53 public hospitals, 52 mention an in-house payment plan, and only six also mention a third-party product.

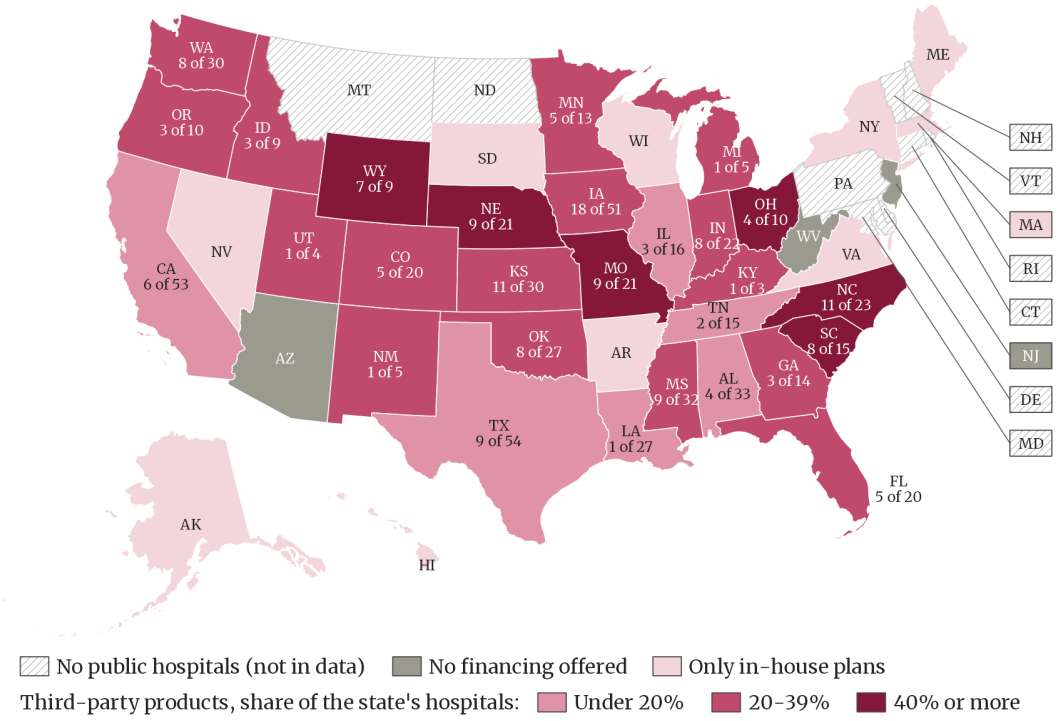
There were six states where more than 40% of the public hospitals in the state had third-party credit products mentioned. This included Wyoming (7 of 9 hospitals; products include ClearBalance, CommerceBank and CareCredit), South Carolina (8 of 15 hospitals; mostly Curae offered at MUSC Health hospitals[3]), and North Carolina (11 of 23 hospitals; mostly AccessOne offered at Atrium Health hospitals).

[3] "Billing, Insurance & Payment Options," MUSC Health, accessed October 26, 2026, https://muschealth.org/patients-visitors/billing.

Figure 2

Public hospitals naming a third-party financing product, by state

163 of 631 hospitals in 28 of 41 states.
Labels show hospitals with a third-party product of all public hospitals in the state.



Legend note: "No financing offered" reflects what we could find in a website review; it does not necessarily mean the hospital offers no financing at all.

Hospitals with both an in-house payment plan and a third-party credit product

We found that 55 hospitals utilize both an in-house payment plan and a third-party financing product; 8.7% of the sample. Most of these hospitals disclosed the length of the in-house plan (the term), a higher proportion than hospitals with only an in-house plan (Table 1). The median term length was also shorter for hospitals with both an in-house plan and third-party products.

Table 1: In-house payment plan terms, by whether the hospital also names a third-party credit product

	In-house + third party	In-house plan only
Hospitals	55	318
Provide a term (length of plan)	40 (71%)	76 (24%)
Range of terms	3–48 months	4–96 months
Median term	12 months	19 months
Term of 12 months or less	29	31
Term over 24 months	4	17

This observation may be because hospitals with third party offerings are more likely to offer shorter terms on in-house plans, preferring that patients with longer terms and larger balances use the third-party options instead. For example, UC San Diego Medical Center (California) offers extended payment plans with ClearBalance for patients with balances older than 12 months.[4] Neosho Memorial Regional Medical Center (Kansas) caps its in-house plan at 6 months, and longer terms are available with CommerceBank.[5]

Who are the third-parties?

A small number of companies account for most third-party medical credit products identified in the sample. Together, the top six companies — CareCredit, AccessOne, ClearBalance, PayZen[6], CarePayment and HELP Financial — account for 107 of the 163 hospitals (66%) with a third-party product. Some of this concentration reflects system-level contracting; for example, nearly half of AccessOne's 20 hospitals belong to Atrium Health.[7]

CareCredit (a Synchrony Bank credit card) is mentioned on 22 hospitals' websites, more than any other vendor from our sample. An additional 11 hospitals referred patients to

[4]"Extended Payment Plans for Medical Bills," UC San Diego Health, accessed October 23, 2026, https://health.ucsd.edu/insurance-billing/extended-bill-payment-plans/.

[5]"Extended Payment Plan," Neosho Memorial Regional Medical Center, accessed October 23, 2026, https://www.nmrmc.com/billing/payment-options/extended-payment-plan/.

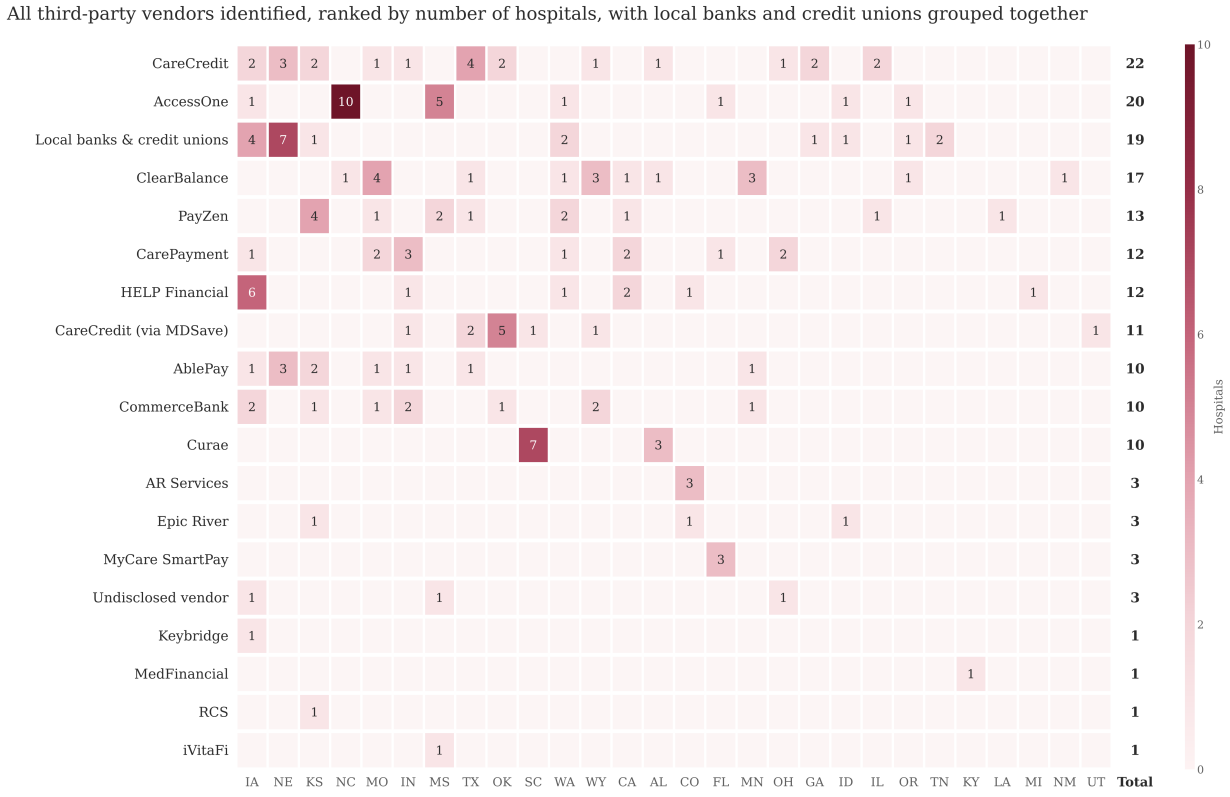
[6]Two hospitals using PayZen do not list on their public facing website but press releases with PayZen advertising use. Brooke Vander Linde, "North Sunflower Medical Center Transforms its Patient Financial Experience," August 3, 2023, accessed May 5, 2026, https://payzen.com/north-sunflower-medical-center-transforms-patient-financial-experience/; "Crawford Memorial Hospital Partners with PayZen to Enhance Patient Affordability and Eliminate Financial Barriers," PayZen, December 8, 2023, accessed May 3, 2026, https://payzen.com/crawford-memorial-hospital-partners-with-payzen-to-enhance-patient-affordability/; Noah Schwartz, "Illinois Critical Access Hospital Partners with AI-powered payment platform," Beckers Hospital Review, December 8, 2023, accessed May 3, 2026, https://www.beckershospitalreview.com/healthcare-information-technology/digital-health/illinois-critical-access-hospital-partners-with-ai-powered-payment-platform/.

[7]Atrium Health is part of Advocate Health, so while they are publicly operated they are part of a larger private nonprofit health system.

MDSave for payment of select services: MDSave is an online platform that can help manage billing and price transparency for hospitals/health systems.[8] According to their website, MDSave has partnered with CareCredit, which patients can apply for during checkout.[9] A further 14 hospitals were listed on CareCredit's directory of participating providers[10] but did not advertise CareCredit on their website; we did not count these listings as promoting a third-party credit product.

The remaining hospitals use a number of smaller platforms including Curae, AblePay, and iVitaFi, in addition to a distinct category worth calling out separately: local banks and credit unions. A number of hospitals, mostly in rural areas, partner directly with a named community lender: GreenState Credit Union is listed with 3 Iowa hospitals, and Strait View Credit Union at 2 Washington hospitals.

Figure 3: Hospital Counts by Medical Credit Vendor and State



Notes: 1) Totals count each hospital once per vendor. Nine hospitals list a second vendor and appear in both rows, so rows sum to 172 vendor listings across 163 hospitals. 2) Local banks and credit unions include

[8] "Risk-Free, Shoppable Episodes of Care - MDSave Direct," MDSave, accessed October 9, 2026, https://www.mdsave.com/providers.

[9] "CareCredit Credit Card Healthcare Financing," MDSave, accessed October 9, 2026, https://www.mdsave.com/financing.

[10] "Find a CareCredit Provider Near You," CareCredit, accessed October 9, 2026, https://www.carecredit.com/doctor-locator/results/.

unnamed local bank loans (6 hospitals), GreenState Credit Union (3), Strait View Credit Union (2), and one hospital each for Ameris Bank Healthcare, Cornerstone Bank, Farmers Bank of Spencer, First Federal Bank, First National Bank, Pinnacle Bank, Spokane Teachers Credit Union, and York State Bank.

What hospitals are disclosing on their websites

Most hospital websites did not list specific information on fees or interest rates for credit products. Of hospitals offering a third-party product, 74 had some description of "interest-free" period, although many had no description of the qualifying conditions, no plan duration, or interest rates after an introductory period finished. Our general observation was that this text often read more like promotional material for the product, rather than providing clear details of the potential costs involved. For example, Ste. Genevieve County Memorial Hospital (Missouri), has a page linked from their *Pricing, Billing & Insurance* site on PayZen, and includes quotes like "*With PayZen, you no longer need to worry about the financial barriers that can accompany necessary medical care. Patients across the country have already seen the benefits, and now SGCMH is making this same opportunity available to you*".[11]

Of the 163 hospitals with a third-party product, 68 (42%) mentioned nothing on interest rates on their websites. Only 52 hospitals (32%) that disclosed information on fees, and 16 hospitals (10%) disclosed information on approval criteria.

> A patient evaluating a financing offer online will usually be unable to determine what the product will cost, whether they qualify, or what they will be charged for missing a payment.

Of the 373 hospitals with an in-house payment plan, 232 (62%) mentioned nothing on interest rates (including terms like "low-interest", "no interest", etc.). About one-third (136; 36%) describe an interest-free plan for what appears to be the full term length. We found three hospitals listing a non-zero interest rate for their in-house payment plans or unpaid balances: 9% APR for Whitman Hospital & Medical Clinics (Washington), 12% for Lincoln Hospital (Washington) on balances not paid in 90 days, and 12% APR (for plans longer than 12 months) for Hancock Regional Hospital (Indiana).[12]

[11] "Introducing the PayZen Program at Ste. Genevieve County Memorial Hospital (SGCMH)," Ste. Genevieve County Memorial Hospital, accessed October 9, 2026, https://stegenevievehospital.org/patients/pricing-billing-insurance/payzen.

[12] "Credit and Collection Policy, Whitman Hospital and Medical Clinics," 2026, https://res.cloudinary.com/dpmykpsih/image/upload/whitman-hospital-site-356/media/059a9da90f484ff297817dd53dee9ae5/2026-credit-collection-policy-pamphlet-revised-05-14-26-002.pdf; "Financial Services," Lincoln Hospital, accessed October 23, 2026, https://www.lincolnhospital.org/patients-and-visitors/financial-services/; "Pay My Bill," Hancock Health, accessed October 9, 2026, https://www.hancockhealth.org/patient-hub/bill-pay/.

Hospitals often direct patients to phone or to visit the vendor website

Given that hospital websites generally did not provide the full product details, it is important to note that these details are likely (and hopefully) provided to patients at other points before enrolment. This could be during a conversation with the billing office, a direct link to a third-party website, or within the hospital's online patient portal.

Of hospitals that mentioned third-party products, 85 (52%) directed patients to phone the billing office or other hospital staff. For example, Coulee Medical Center (Washington) directs website visitors to apply for a HELP Payment Plan by calling their patient accounts department.[13]

Ninety-nine (61% of the 163) hospitals' websites direct the patient to the vendor's website or application. Seven MUSC Health hospitals (South Carolina) and two DCH Health hospitals (Alabama) directed patients to the Curae application. On the DCH website, the text on the billing page reads: "Pay your balance over time in monthly payments to fit your budget. Apply online" and links to the Curae website (Curae is not specifically named on the health system's website).[14]

At the 9 Atrium Health hospitals in North Carolina, payment plans are run by AccessOne, and patients set them up from within the health system's patient portal or by phone; no terms are shown on the public website. At the time of our data collection, Atrium Health's *Explain My Bill* page stated patients could click on "'Set up a payment plan with AccessOne' option on MyAtriumHealth".[15]

What the more transparent hospitals do differently

Here, we highlight specific examples of hospitals presenting plan terms on their website. While transparency does not necessarily mean the financing is affordable for patients, it does at least provide patients information upfront and early as they consider their options.

Seven hospitals publish a non-zero interest rate for a third-party product:

- Coosa Valley (Alabama) provides a link to a CareCredit rates and fees table (32.99% APR).[16]
- McDonough District (Illinois) describes balance sizes, terms, and interest rates

[13] "Financial Assistance," Coulee Medical Center, accessed October 9, 2026, https://cmccares.org/patient-visitors/billing-insurance/financial-assistance/.

[14] "Online Bill Pay," DCH Health System, accessed October 9, 2026, https://www.dchsystem.com/bill-pay/.

[15] As of October 6, 2026, Atrium Health's *Explain My Bill* page no longer mentions AccessOne in relation to the "Set up a payment plan" option in MyAtriumHealth, although, at the time of writing, AccessOne is still listed in the section *Why can't I see my balance online* (as balances may be transferred to AccessOne).

[16] "CVMC Accepts CareCredit," Coosa Valley Medical Center, accessed October 9, 2026, https://www.cvhealth.net/CVMC/CareCredit.

available through their CareCredit plans (bills over $1,000 can be paid over 12 months with no interest, or 24, 36, or 48 months at 17.9%, 18.9%, 19.9% APR, respectively).[17]

- Grand River Hospital District (Colorado) provides a clear description of the balances that are forwarded to their vendor, AR Services, including that accounts not fully paid or in a payment plan within 90 days will be referred to a collection agency. They state that AR services offer a "Medical Financing" option at 12% interest for up to 5 years.[18]
- Crawford County Memorial Hospital (Iowa) describes the options available through GreenState Credit Union, including that variable loan terms are available with "rates as low as 9.99% APR".[19] Note, the maximum interest rate is not published on this site. For contrast, two other Iowa hospitals also partner with GreenState Credit Union and just state "low rates" on their websites.
- Minidoka Memorial Hospital (Idaho) displays details on their payment plan offered through First Federal Bank: APR (9.5%), loan term (60 months), and that there are zero penalties for paying the loan early.[20]
- Van Diest Medical Center, Kossuth Regional Health Center and Palo Alto County Health System (Iowa) all offer payment plans through HELP Financial for 12 to 36 months, and state the 12 month introductory period is 0% APR, and then only 4.0% APR on the remaining principal balance after this period.

For patients: questions to ask before enrolling

If you have an unpaid balance from a hospital or other medical visit, your health care provider may provide you an option to apply for a medical credit card or other financing. These are some questions to ask before signing up.

- **Who are they**? Is this the hospital (an in-house payment plan), a bank, a fintech, or a credit union?
- **When I apply, will this impact my credit**? Some lenders may require a hard credit check, which can impact your credit score.
- **Is this deferred interest**? Look for phrases like "interest-free for 6 months". If you do not pay the full amount over this time, you might be charged the interest from the first date you enrolled in the plan.

[17] "Payment Options," McDonough District Hospital, accessed October 9, 2026, https://www.mdh.org/patients-visitors/financial-services/payment-options/.

[18] "Billing and Insurance," Grand River Hospital District, September 27, 2026, https://grandriverhealth.org/patients-visitors/billing-and-insurance/.

[19] "Billing Information & Financial Assistance," Crawford County Memorial Hospital, accessed October 9, 2026, https://ccmhia.com/patient-visitor-information/billing-information/.

[20] "Medical Billing Information & Payment Options Near Me," Minidoka Memorial Hospital, accessed October 9, 2026, https://minidokamemorial.org/billing-information/.

- **If I am in a plan with deferred interest, what is my monthly payment in order to pay my balance before the interest-free period ends?** Like other types of credit cards, medical credit cards may show you a "minimum monthly payment," which is only the amount you need to pay to avoid penalties. Usually these are not high enough to pay off the balance and avoid deferred interest.
- **If I miss payments, what are the penalties?** There might be additional charges for missed payments. Will the lender send your account to a collection agency, or use other extreme debt collection methods?
- **While I am paying off my balance, is my credit impacted?** Some states ban the reporting of medical debt on credit reports, yet patients in these states still reported negative impacts on their credit due to medical debt.[21]
- **Am I eligible for the hospital's financial assistance or charity care program?** All private non-profit hospitals have a financial assistance program, as well as some public and for-profit hospitals. You may be eligible based on your income or other factors. Even if the monthly payments offered by a plan are affordable, you could receive a full or partial discount on your entire bill.

Policy implications

The CFPB's 2023 report found that patients used deferred-interest medical credit cards and installment loans to cover nearly $23 billion in health care expenses, typically at rates above conventional credit.[22] With nearly a quarter of public hospitals offering third party medical credit products, policymakers should look to better regulate these products and providers, to protect patients from financial harm. A recent policy brief from the NCLC[23] outlines ways that states can regulate these products:

1) **Target lenders** that offer medical credit products by limiting interest rates, prohibit deferred interest, banning reporting of medical debt to credit agencies, and requiring better disclosure of plan terms and in multiple languages.
2) **Target providers** that partner with lenders to offer medical credit products by prohibiting promotion of cards with deferred interest or when patients' insurance will cover the service, requiring standard disclosures, requiring patients be screened for financial assistance before offering a credit card, require nonprofit hospitals to offer low-interest payment plans before offering a credit card.

[21] M. Karpman, "How Does Medical Debt Affect U.S. Families?," RWJF and Urban Institute, October 2026, accessed October 9, 2026, https://www.rwjf.org/content/rwjf-web/us/en/insights/our-research/2026/10/how-does-medical-debt-affect-us-families.html.

[22] Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, "CFPB Report Highlights Costly Credit Cards and Loans Pushed on Patients."

[23] "What States Can Do: Medical Credit Cards and Other Medical Lending Products," National Consumer Law Center, September 14, 2026, accessed October 9, 2026, https://www.nclc.org/resources/what-states-can-do-medical-credit-cards-and-other-medical-lending-products/.

The proliferation of medical credit cards is a symptom of the larger problem of unaffordable healthcare. Reducing the need for medical credit products will require policymakers to do much more to fill gaps in healthcare coverage, reduce out-of-pocket expenses like deductibles and copays, reduce the burden of prior authorization, and lower prices for medical care.[24]

Table 2: Selected state regulations on medical credit products

State	Regulation
California	Healthcare providers cannot enroll patients in a credit card or loan with deferred interest; they cannot sign up patients for a third-party credit card or loan if the patient is sedated or unconscious, or complete any portion of an application for the patient.[25]
Connecticut	Beginning January 2027, healthcare providers are prohibited from advertising or promoting medical credit cards, assisting a consumer in acquiring a card, or charging services to a medical credit card before the service is provided.[26]
Maryland	Any loan or credit product offered by a hospital must comply with payment plan guidelines as regulated by the state.[27]
New York	Hospitals or healthcare providers cannot complete any portion of an application for medical financial products for the patient, or otherwise arrange for or establish an application that is not completely filled out by the patient.[28]
Washington, DC	Healthcare facilities are required to offer in-house payment plans to low-income patients with unpaid medical bills and prohibited from reporting medical debt to credit agencies.[29]

[24] Nathan Hostert et al., "In 2026, States Are Leading On Health Care Affordability," Health Affairs Forefront, September 18, 2026, https://www.healthaffairs.org/content/forefront/2026-states-leading-health-care-affordability.

[25] "California Business and Professions Code § 654.3," California Legislative Information, accessed October 9, 2026, https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?sectionNum=654.3.&lawCode=BPC.

[26] "Public Act No. 26-6: An Act Concerning Credit Cards and Health and Veterinary Care Services," Connecticut General Assembly, accessed October 9, 2026, https://www.cga.ct.gov/2026/ACT/PA/PDF/2026PA-00006-R00HB-05127-PA.pdf.

[27] "COMAR 10.37.13.05, Guidelines for Hospital Payment Plans," Library of Maryland Regulations, accessed October 9, 2026, https://regs.maryland.gov/us/md/exec/comar/10.37.13.05.

[28] "DAL CPSO 2024-01," New York Department of Health, accessed October 9, 2026, https://www.health.ny.gov/facilities/hospital/financial_assist/docs/dal_24-01.pdf.

[29] "B26-0438 - Medical Debt Mitigation Amendment Act of 2025," Council of the District of Columbia, accessed October 9, 2026, https://lims.dccouncil.gov/Legislation/B26-0438.

Behind the brands: case studies of medical credit third-party offerings

We identified 28 distinct third-party companies named on hospital websites. The underlying financial entity, regulatory framework, and consumer protections vary considerably across these products. When a patient enrolls, they may be entering a relationship with the hospital, a bank or credit union, or a fintech company. Because hospital websites rarely publish terms, the profiles below draw on each company's public disclosures and outside reporting along with our review of hospital websites.

CareCredit Synchrony Bank

Named by 22 hospitals (additional 11 hospitals via MDSave) · 3.5% of all public hospitals · 13% of those naming a third-party product

What it is	Medical credit card issued by Synchrony Bank, usable across a national provider network.
Who qualifies	Subject to credit approval
Terms	This can vary by hospital. CareCredit FAQ states they have plans from 6 to 60 months (some with deferred interest); McDonough Hospital (Illinois) stated 18 months interest-free, and +24 months with higher interest.
Interest	There may be promotional periods with deferred interest, so balances paid completely in this time have no interest. CareCredit FAQ and their public agreement states the APR 32.99%, with a penalty APR 39.99% for late payments.[30]
What we're watching	Deferred and high interest rates can mean patients are paying more for their care than the original bill amount. Patients who may qualify for hospital financial assistance may be offered CareCredit instead.

CareCredit uses deferred interest, also called retroactive interest. If a person enrolls and does not pay the full balance by the end of the 'interest-free' period, then all of the interest that would have accrued during this period is added to the remaining balance. The Federal Reserve puts the average APR on interest-bearing credit card accounts at roughly 22%, which is lower than the 32.99% from CareCredit.[31] Deferred interest has drawn criticism

[30] "CareCredit FAQs," CareCredit, accessed October 9, 2026, https://www.carecredit.com/faqs/.

[31] "Consumer Credit - G.19," the Federal Reserve, accessed October 9, 2026, https://www.federalreserve.gov/releases/g19/current/.

because plans appear to be "interest-free" when in reality they are only interest-free if the entire balance is paid in full during the promotional period. This can lead to unexpected large bills.[32] Importantly, making only the minimum payment amount will mean that a person will not pay off the balance within the promotional period.

AccessOne

Named by 20 hospitals · 3.2% of all public hospitals · 12% of those naming a third-party product

What it is	Third-party servicer that administers payment plans for hospitals; not a bank or credit card
Who qualifies	States all patients qualify, with no credit check and no reporting to credit bureaus.
Terms	This varies by hospital. Ocean Beach Health (Washington) states AccessOne offers plans with terms 6-60 months.[33] In an online search, we found Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist (a private nonprofit facility) offering AccessOne plans ranging from 12-100 months.[34]
Interest	Both 0% and interest-bearing plans, depending on the hospital's contract. Plans with 0% have a higher monthly payment.
What we're watching	Interest rates can mean patients are paying more for their care than the original bill amount. Patients who may qualify for hospital financial assistance may be offered an AccessOne plan instead.

Hospitals pay AccessOne a servicing fee, the amount of which depends on whether the hospital receives the unpaid patient balances upfront or over time as the patient makes payments to AccessOne.[35] If patients miss multiple consecutive payments, then AccessOne will return the account to the hospital. AccessOne sets interest terms through hospital

[32]"Warren, Markey, Sanders Release Troubling Findings on Medical Credit Cards That Threaten Patients' Finances," Office of Senator Warren, accessed October 9, 2026, https://www.warren.senate.gov/news/press-releases/warren-markey-sanders-release-troubling-findings-on-medical-credit-cards-that-threaten-patients-finances/.

[33]"Paying Your Bill," Ocean Beach Health - Ocean Beach Hospital, accessed October 9, 2026, https://www.oceanbeachhealth.com/paying-your-bill/.

[34]"Patient Financing Through AccessOne," Atrium Health Wake Forest Baptist, accessed October 9, 2026, https://www.wakehealth.edu/patient-and-family-resources/billing-and-insurance/patient-financing-through-accessone.

[35]National Consumer Law Center, et al., "Comments in Response to CFPB, HHS, and Treasury Request for Information Regarding Medical Payment Products," September 11, 2023, https://www.nclc.org/resources/comments-in-response-to-cfpb-hhs-and-treasury-request-for-information-regarding-medical-payment-products/.

contracts rather than a set rate across all of its plans, meaning the terms for patients can change depending on where they receive care. According to a report by consumer law firm Maginnis Howard, about half of enrolled patients at Atrium Health (North Carolina) held plans with roughly 13% interest.[36]

ClearBalance CSI Financial Services

Named by 17 hospitals · 2.7% of all public hospitals · 10% of those naming a third-party product

What it is	Zero-interest revolving credit account, administered by ClearBalance and issued by a partner bank (banks in our data included Pathward, N.A., Western Alliance Bank, and Umpqua Bank)
Who qualifies	We observed no mentions of credit checks; several hospitals state all patients are accepted regardless of credit score.
Terms	No mention in our data; it likely varies by hospital.
Interest	States no interest.
What we're watching	Patients who may qualify for hospital financial assistance may be offered an ClearBalance plan instead. Hospitals may not be able to resolve billing disputes once the account is transferred to ClearBalance.[37]

ClearBalance charges hospitals a fee to manage and collect their unpaid balances.[38] Hospitals receive upfront funding for all unpaid balances, but retains the responsibility for collections if a patient cannot pay their monthly payments (a 'recourse model').[39] ClearBalance is a program administrator rather than a lender. It arranges accounts issued by a partner bank and provides the servicing, which is why the brand stays constant across hospitals while the underlying lender varies. Partner banks likely take on these accounts because they don't bear the risk of patients defaulting on their payments (since these accounts are returned to the hospital).[40]

[36]"What Do Patients Want You to Know About AccessOne MedCard?" Maginnis Howard Law firm, September, 2023, accessed October 9, 2026, https://www.carolinalaw.com/2023/09/what-do-patients-want-you-to-know-about-accessone-medcard/.

[37]Eli Rushbanks, Jared Walker, "Public Comment to Consumer Financial Protection Bureau," Dollar For, September 2023, accessed October 9, 2026, https://dollarfor.org/public-comment-to-consumer-financial-protection-bureau/.

[38]Jeff Lagasse, "Healthcare Providers Explore No-Interest Loans to Help Patients Pay for Care, Say Move Cuts Bad Debt," *Healthcare Finance News*, July 6, 2016, https://www.healthcarefinancenews.com/news/healthcare-providers-explore-no-interest-loans-help-patients-pay-care-say-move-cuts-bad-debt.

[39]"Leveraging Recourse Patient Financing: A Strategy for Strengthening Healthcare Organizations' Financial Performance, Compliance, and Patient Experience," ClearBalance, August 27, 2024, https://clearbalance.org/a-comparative-analysis-recourse-vs-non-recourse-financing-models-in-heal/.

[40]"Compare AccessOne vs ClearBalance," CB Insights, accessed October 9, 2026, https://www.cbinsights.

While the zero-interest plans are a plus for patients compared to plans with high interest rates, patients and (ultimately) hospitals should ensure these plans are not an alternative for financial assistance. There has been at least one case we found via Dollar For where a patient's debt was referred to ClearBalance who would otherwise be eligible for financial assistance from the hospital.[41]

Payzen

Named by 13 hospitals · 2.1% of all public hospitals · 8% of those naming a third-party product

What it is	Venture-backed fintech founded in 2019 that offers payment plans and a "Care Card" that health systems can offer to patients for scheduled care (issued by Patriot Bank, N.A).[42]
Who qualifies	States it approves almost all patients (people must be in good standing with prior Payzen payments); however, the FAQ states that "eligibility is determined instantly using a patient's healthcare bill and ability-to-pay data."[43]
Terms	Plans ranging from 3 to 60 months.
Interest	States no interest.
What we're watching	Patients who may qualify for hospital financial assistance may be offered a Payzen plan instead. Patient data and information is used in their AI platforms. Hospitals sell accounts to Payzen with the full amount discounted based on the risk of default: lower income patients could benefit from this discount themselves.

Founded in 2019, PayZen represents the newest financing model in our sample, supported by a $32 million Series B in 2024 and a $200 million credit facility.[44] Payzen's marketing emphasizes its use of Artificial Intelligence to offer tailored plans to patients (varying monthly payment amounts and plan term), which appears to be determined using patients' demographic and health data. AI is also used during the course of the plan to adjust the payment if patients are missing payments or have temporary hardship.[45]

com/compare/accessone-vs-clearbalance.

[41]Dollar For, *Public Comment to Consumer Financial Protection Bureau*.

[42]"Care Card," PayZen, accessed October 9, 2026, https://payzen.com/carecard/.

[43]"AI-Powered Patient Financing for Health Systems," PayZen, accessed October 9, 2026, https://payzen.com/patient-financing/.

[44]Marina Temkin, "PayZen Secures $32M Series B, $200M Debt Facility to Grow Its 'Care Now, Pay Later' Product," TechCrunch, August 13, 2024, accessed October 9, 2026, https://techcrunch.com/2024/08/13/payzen-secures-23m-series-b-led-by-nea-and-200m-in-debt-to-expand-care-now-pay-later-offering/.

[45]Brooke Vander Linde, "Beyond Billing: How AI Is Personalizing Healthcare Payment Solutions," PayZen, March 17, 2025, https://payzen.com/how-ai-is-personalizing-healthcare-payment-solutions/.

Payzen purchases the debt from the hospital at a fraction of the full balance (called a 'receivables discount').[46] The size of this discount also depends on its estimates of a patient's ability to pay the full bill amount over time. In a contract with UTMB Health (released through FOIA requests and viewed by the authors), Payzen assigns grades to patients based on the financial risk and the size of the receivables discount ranged from 10% to 90% depending on this grade. Arguably, given health systems are willing to accept these discounted payments, these could also be offered to patients; a person assigned a low-grade will have to pay the full amount to Payzen, while Payzen only pays 10% of this amount to the hospital.[47]

Health systems are offered both non-recourse or recourse options of financing, meaning they can decide whether unpaid accounts are returned to the health system or not.[48] Using an internet search (outside of our sample), we found an example of M Health Fairview using Payzen with a recourse model, as they state that unpaid balances are returned to Fairview and can be sent to a collection agency.[49] For non-recourse models, Payzen does state on their website that they do not use aggressive collection actions. This is probably because rates of non-payments are incorporated into the price paid on the debt.

[46]"Recourse vs Nonrecourse Patient Financing," PayZen, accessed October 9, 2026, https://payzen.com/recourse-non-recourse-patient-financing-solutions/.

[47]Jessica Glenza, "AI-Backed Patient Financing Firm Portrays Payment Plans as Healthcare Solution amid Consumer Group's Warnings," *The Guardian*, July 25, 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/jul/25/payzen-medical-debt-company-payment-plans.

[48]"Request a Demo," PayZen, accessed October 9, 2026, https://payzen.com/request-a-demo/.

[49]"PayZen," M Health Fairview, accessed October 9, 2026, https://www.mhealthfairview.org/bill-pay-and-financial-resources/support/payment-plan/payzen.

Local banks and credit unions

Named by 13 hospitals across 10 lenders · 2% of all public hospitals · 8% of those naming a third-party product

What it is	Partnerships with a named community lender, mostly at rural hospitals (including GreenState Credit Union, Strait View Credit Union, Cornerstone Bank, Spokane Teachers Credit Union, York State Bank)
Who qualifies	Varies by hospital/institution. Strait View Credit Union hospital websites stated the loan is "pre-approved and hospital-guaranteed", while Pinnacle Bank on Chase County Hospital (Nebraska) states loans are available to "qualifying patients".
Terms	Varies by hospital/institution. The maximum we saw in our sample was 60 months (GreenState Credit Union, Farmers Bank of Spencer).
Interest	Varies by hospital/institution. We saw quotes of 9.5% APR, "at least 9.99% APR", and also mentions of "competitive rates" and "interest-free" plans.
What we're watching	Interest rates can mean patients are paying more for their care than the original bill amount. Patients who may qualify for hospital financial assistance may be offered a loan instead. It's not clear if patients are at-risk of aggressive debt collection actions from these institutions.

Thirteen hospitals partner with a named local bank or credit union, almost all of them rural facilities in Iowa, Nebraska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Georgia. Enrollment typically requires a formal loan application and a credit check, although this was not a requirement at all hospitals.[50]

These hospitals were also the most transparent group in our sample with regards to interest rates (excluding the products with 0% APR), with 10 out of 14 disclosing specific interest rate terms. Minidoka Memorial Hospital (Idaho) distinguishes its interest-free in-house plan (available for 12 months, if paid in full) from a First Federal Bank loan at 9.5% APR for 60 months. Crawford County Memorial Hospital (Iowa) states that GreenState's credit card option has deferred interest for six months while its loan product carries a minimum interest rate of 9.99%. Box Butte General Hospital (Nebraska) advertises interest-free financing up to 12 months before a "low-interest" First National Bank loan applies. Liberty Regional Medical Center (Georgia) publishes interest-free terms up to 36

[50] "Financial Assistance," Olympic Medical Center, accessed October 9, 2026, https://www.olympicmedical.org/patients-visitors/billing-and-financial-services/financial-assistance/.

months through Ameris Bank.

These local partnerships may be beneficial for hospitals and patients in terms of trust: partnering with a local bank sounds less harmful than selling debt to a national company. However, patients should still be made aware of the risk of collection actions and whether this responsibility lies with the bank/credit union or hospital (see *For patients: questions to ask before enrolling*).

Areas for future research

Limitations of our analysis

This analysis is based solely on publicly available website content. It captures what a patient could learn by researching their hospital online. Our review cannot speak to how products are described verbally at the point of enrollment or any paperwork received by the patient. Where we report that a term was "not disclosed," that means it was not disclosed on the website; it does not mean the patient was never told.

Sample sizes vary enormously by state, from 57 hospitals in Texas to a single hospital in several others, and state-level percentages should be read accordingly.

We used AI agents to screen hospital websites. While anything with a third-party vendor named was manually reviewed, we may be undercounting hospitals with these products or in-house plans.

Our vendor identification captures the product a hospital names on its website, which may understate arrangements that exist but go unmentioned. The CareCredit figures in particular likely undercount hospitals that accept the card without promoting it. We found hospitals in our sample listed on CareCredit's website as partnering institutions, but not on the hospital websites themselves. Relatedly, MDSave was mentioned on several hospital websites as a way to receive a consolidated bill from providers at the hospital. MDSave and CareCredit announced a partnership where CareCredit is a payment option.[51] It was not clear to us whether CareCredit is available at all hospitals enrolled with MDSave, but given the framing of the MDSave/CareCredit partnership we decided to include these hospitals.

What we would like to know

Healthcare costs are high and increasing, and research has shown that hospital prices have increased as a result of market consolidation. Insurance premiums and out-of-pocket costs have also increased, with more people enrolled in higher deductible plans or without coverage at all. Patients are being left with the gap between what the hospital charges

[51] "CareCredit Credit Card Healthcare Financing," MDSave.

and the insurer covers, and this gap is growing. Medical credit products might make this payment a little bit more manageable for individuals month-to-month, but this does not mean our healthcare is affordable nor that we should stop looking for solutions to reduce healthcare costs. We should be skeptical of financial institutions and fintech companies moving into this space if our goal is to reduce costs and have fewer people with medical debt.

Given this, our suggestion for areas of future research are:

- How many patients are eligible for financial assistance, but are instead only offered a payment plan?
- What are the impacts on financial assistance spending for hospitals that partner with these vendors?
- What are the impacts on hospital charges and prices after they partner with a vendor?
- What impacts do these vendors have on the use of debt collection actions against patients?
- How do our findings on public hospitals compare to the industry's involvement with private nonprofit and for-profit hospitals?

Appendix: Included hospitals and methods

Sample. We included public hospitals from the 2026 release of the Lown Institute's Hospitals Index of Social Responsibility. This includes hospitals that were in the CMS Hospitals General Information dataset (version February 2026), were not specialty hospitals, and had a volume of at least 50 Medicare-enrolled patients between 2021 and 2024 (see our full methodology and criteria[52]). To determine whether a hospital is publicly owned, we used the Lown Institute's ownership classification, which draws on IRS records (Form 990 filings and the Exempt OrganizationBusiness Master File), CMS enrollment and ownership data, and manual verification of ambiguous cases. We define a "public hospital" as a non-federal hospital owned or controlled by a government entity — a city or county, a state, or a hospital district or authority. Government-affiliated hospitals that file IRS Form 990s as independent nonprofits are classified as nonprofit rather than public.

Data collection. We collected data from March through October 2026.

In the first stage (March to August), we used Claude AI agents to screen the public-facing website of each of the 631 hospitals in the sample. The agent ran a web search to review billing, financial assistance, payment, and patient resource pages and classified each hospital according to whether the site mentioned any financing option. We set aside hospitals with no financing mentioned anywhere on the site and flagged those mentioning

[52]Vikas Saini et al., "2026 Methodology of the Lown Institute Hospitals Index for Social Responsibility," The Lown Institute, https://lownhospitalsindex.org/rankings/our-methodology/.

an in-house payment plan, a third-party medical credit product, or both for the second stage. The purpose of this stage was to narrow the sample efficiently rather than to extract terms, and its output was a binary flag plus the pages on which financing was identified.

We manually spot-checked a randomly selected sample of the hospitals the AI agents screened out as having no financing option, reviewing those websites directly to confirm the classification and to test for false negatives at the screening stage. While the sensitivity and specificity to third-party vendor detection was high, we did initially undercount in-house payment plans. These were sometimes mentioned in financial assistance or collections policies, and not on the main site or with much detail provided. In October, we ran additional Claude AI agents to re-check hospital websites for in-house payment plans, with a much higher detection rate. All pages flagged with a financing option have a URL saved, and we have saved screenshots of those with a named third-party lender.

In the second stage, we manually visited every flagged hospital website and coded the detailed variables reported throughout this piece: whether the offering was in-house, third-party, or both; the named vendor where one appeared; where on the site the offering was advertised; the call to action and enrollment route; and whether interest rates, fees, approval criteria, and income eligibility thresholds were disclosed prior to enrollment. We also confirmed or corrected the first-stage classification during this review. All figures reported in this analysis come from our manual review, not from the automated screening stage.

Interpreting non-disclosure. We coded a term as not disclosed when it could not be found on the hospital's public website prior to enrollment. Where the site directed patients to a phone number, portal login, or vendor application before surfacing terms, we recorded that separately as the enrollment route. Non-disclosure on a website does not establish that a hospital withholds terms from patients through other channels.