

Exchange Visitor Program Participant (J-1/J-2) Mandatory Health Coverage Requirement

Regulation

The U.S. Department of State (DOS) requires individuals who receive a Form DS-2019 (J-1 visa document) and enter the United States as a J-1 Exchange Visitor to maintain medical insurance for themselves and any accompanying J-2 dependents for the duration of their stay in the United States. Failure to carry the required insurance coverage places them “out of status” and renders them ineligible for extension of stay, employment or change to another status. These DOS regulations are published in the Code of Federal Regulations [22 CFR 62.14].

Minimal Medical Coverage Requirements

The medical health insurance plan must cover all J-1/J-2 participants for accidents, sickness, medical evacuation and repatriation. Please review your current policy to determine whether that insurance plan meets the minimum requirements as described below. The Office of International Student and Scholar Services at UNCG does not have the authority to waive these federal requirements for any Exchange Visitor or dependents.

- **Coverage for Accidents, Sickness (Lifetime/Per Occurrence Maximums).** Exchange Visitors must have insurance that will pay at least \$50,000 for each specific illness or injury (**effective May 15, 2015, the required amount is \$100,000**). Be aware that medical treatment in the United States for major illnesses can cost several times that amount.
 - **Deductible Amounts.** Most insurance policies require you to pay part of your health expenses yourself (your part is called the deductible), before the company pays anything. J regulations limit the deductible to \$500 per accident or illness.
 - **Coinsurance.** After you have paid the deductible, the insurance company usually only pays a percentage of your medical expenses. The policy might pay 80%, for example, and you would have to pay the remaining 20% of the expense. This is called the coinsurance. The J regulations require the insurance company to pay at least 75% of covered medical expenses.
 - **Medical Evacuation.** If because of a serious injury or illness, you must be sent home on the advice of your doctor, the insurance policy must pay up to \$10,000 provision for medical travel expenses (**effective May 15, 2015, the required amount is \$50,000**).
 - **Repatriation of Remains.** In the event of death in the United States, the insurance policy must provide at least \$7,500 to send your remains to your home country for burial (**effective May 15, 2015, the required amount is \$25,000**).
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When selecting a medical insurance provider, ensure the provider meets the minimum specifications listed below:

- an A.M. Best rating of “A-“ or above;
- an Insurance Solvency International, Ltd. (ISI) rating of “A-1” or above;
- a Standard & Poor’s Claims-paying Ability rating of “A-“ or above;
- a Weiss Research, Inc., rating of B+ or above; or
- be backed by the full faith and credit of the exchange visitor’s home country.

Other Important Factors

- **Pre-existing Conditions.** Most policies will not cover health problems you had before you purchase insurance (known as pre-existing conditions) - this may include pregnancy.
 - **Exclusions.** Most insurance policies do not cover certain conditions. The J regulations require that if a particular activity is a part of your Exchange Visitor program, your insurance must cover injuries resulting from your participation in that activity. Read the list of exclusions carefully so that you understand exactly what is not covered by the policy.
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For further information regarding medical insurance terminology click [here](#).

Considerations

Some scholars will receive health insurance coverage as part of their UNCG employment package. The insurance covers some of the required items. In order to ensure a full level of coverage, purchase of supplementary insurance including the following items is required: medical evacuation and repatriation of remains and \$500 maximum deductible per illness.

Most scholars will have to purchase insurance and ensure coverage of all required items listed above. The medical insurance coverage may be from your home country or from a U.S. medical insurance provider.

Affordable Care Act and International Scholars

International scholars at UNCG should also be aware that they may be responsible for meeting health insurance guidelines set by the U.S. Government under The Affordable Care Act (ACA). Also known as “Obama Care,” ACA is a national health care law that took effect January 1, 2014. Under this law, **every person who is a resident alien for tax purposes is required to have health insurance that meets "minimum essential health coverage" guidelines.**

Minimum essential health coverage includes:

Ambulatory patient services; Emergency services; Hospitalization (such as surgery); Maternity and newborn care (care before and after the baby is born); Mental health and substance use disorder services, including behavioral health treatment; Prescription drugs; Rehabilitative and habilitative services and devices; Laboratory services; Preventative and wellness services and chronic disease management; Pediatric services.

Failure to get ACA compliant minimum essential health coverage will result in the individual being required to pay a penalty called a “shared responsibility payment” at the time of filing tax forms, starting in tax year 2014. For more information, please go to IRS website: <http://www.irs.gov/Affordable-Care-Act/Individuals-and-Families/Individual-Shared-Responsibility-Provision>

J-1 exchange visitors in non-student categories (such as Research Scholar/Professor/Short-term Scholar) are **exempt from the mandate to have health insurance that meets the ACA requirement if their federal tax residency status is “non-resident alien.”** J-1 exchange

visitors are usually non-resident aliens for the first two calendar years (the year they first enter the U.S. and the following year). However, this may not be true if the exchange visitor has a previous U.S. visa history. Determining your tax residency status is rather complicated; thus, it is recommended that you refer to your tax consultant to confirm your tax residency status if you are not sure. **Once you and your family members become “resident aliens” for federal tax purposes, you are required to have health insurance that meets the ACA requirements in order to avoid paying the penalty.**

Further information about ACA is found in the [NAFSA resources website](#).

U.S. Health Insurance Providers

A list of insurance companies that provide health insurance to J-1 visitors and their dependents is listed below. As you evaluate options provided by different insurance companies, consider your individual and dependents' needs for health insurance coverage and assess whether a particular health insurance plan meets those needs. We recommend that you identify the medical insurance plan that best meets your needs while fulfilling the U.S. Department of State insurance requirements described above. You may purchase medical insurance coverage with HTH Worldwide Insurance Services through the International Programs Center (this is an option).

HTH Worldwide Insurance Services, 1.888.350.2002, www.hthstudents.com

Other options are included below as well for your convenience:

ISO Student Health Insurance, 800.244.1180, <https://www.isoa.org>

Cultural Insurance Services International, 203-399-5556, <http://www.culturalinsurance.com/>

The Harbour Group, 1-800-252-8160, <http://www.hginsurance.com/>

Compass Benefits, 800-767-0169, <https://compassstudenthealthinsurance.com/>

Attestation Form

J-1 Scholars at UNCG are required to sign the form [Insurance Requirement Attestation Form](#) stating that they understand and will comply with the J Exchange Visitor Program health insurance requirements.