

There's Another "Gap" in Obamacare, And We Just Fell Through It...

By Steven Womack

Sometime in late 2012 or early 2013, the cost of health insurance and health care became my family's largest single expense: bigger than our mortgage payment, bigger than my child support costs from a previous marriage, and larger than our total tax liability. Now, two years later, our health insurance costs have dropped dramatically. How did we manage to accomplish this?

Easy. My wife and I made the painful, agonizing, difficult choice to drop health insurance *altogether*.

My wife and I have five college degrees between us. We're both writers and I'm a full-time college professor. So how did we wind up without health insurance in the 21st century? The answer points out the lunacy in the American health care system and the failings of the Affordable Care Act.

Like most people, we've historically obtained health insurance through my employer. And like most people, we've had to bear an increasingly large portion of the costs of health care over the years. The way my employer structures the health care benefit, my health insurance is fully provided, at no cost to me. However, I pay 100 percent of the cost of insuring my family.

In 2012, the premium for insuring my wife and my two daughters in the same network plan we'd been in for years topped \$1000.00 a month. To cut costs, we switched to a High Deductible Health Plan, which knocked the premium down to \$750.00 a month but left us with some frightening high-end exposure.

For the next three years, due to accidents and health issues, we hit the family out-of-pocket maximum. Then, on September 1st of this year (the renewal date for my employer's health plan), we got the news that in order to keep the premiums from going up over thirty percent, our deductibles and family out-of-pocket maximum were being raised from six to *ten-thousand* a year. To make matters worse, the increase was effective immediately.

This meant that for the last four months of 2015, we were liable for another four grand in deductibles, plus three-thousand for the premiums. Then, on January 1, 2016, the deductibles and out-of-pocket maximums reset to zero. We ran the numbers: for the last four months of 2015 and the twelve months of 2016, we were potentially, and probably, on the hook for \$26,000.

It broke us. We couldn't do it.

I filed the paperwork to take us out of the system. Several of my friends and colleagues asked why I didn't just keep insurance for myself, since the premium was fully covered by my employer. How, I asked them, could I do that to my wife and daughters, keep health insurance for myself while they had none?

What a hell of a choice...

My ex-wife enrolled our daughters in the state-sponsored CHIP insurance program. They actually now have better health insurance than I was able to get them through my employer.

As for me and my wife, we're out in the cold for now. The exchanges have just re-opened and we're going to try our luck with them. The problem is we fall into the other major gap in Obamacare beside the "Medicaid" gap. Under Obamacare rules, if your employer offers you health insurance, you're supposed to take it—unless the cost exceeds ten percent of your annual salary, in which case it's deemed unaffordable. Then you can move to the exchanges, buy health insurance, and get the tax credits and subsidies to help pay for it.

Unfortunately, under Obamacare rules, when running that calculation, they only consider the cost *to the employee*, not the overall cost to the family.

So we're out of luck in terms of subsidies or tax credits. Maybe we can find something, but it's not going to be cheap and it's not going to be simple. It may not even be affordable. If we don't get insurance, then come tax time, we face paying the penalty. I don't want to think about what happens if either of us gets sick again or has another accident.

It's lunacy. In no other industrialized nation on earth can you lose everything because of medical expenses, which are now the single biggest cause of bankruptcies in America. And until we finally arrive at single-payer, affordable, accessible, and universal health care—like every other civilized country in the world—this is just the way things are.

Welcome to America...