



# “Alternative Benefits” News

Brought to you by: Tom Buonanduci

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## Are You Being Served? (And Do You Really Want to Be?)

Self-checkout options first appeared in grocery stores more than a decade ago, offering shoppers a “quick” and “easy” alternative to lining up. Now, self-serve alternatives appear everywhere, from fast food restaurants to movie theatres. But do they truly offer consumers ease, speed, and convenience? Maybe not.

In a recent episode of the television show *Marketplace*, shoppers were provided with identical grocery lists; some were asked to use the self-checkout, while others lined up for a cashier. Interestingly, the cashier was faster, and made fewer mistakes. The show noted that mistakes are common among self-serve customers, who often enter the incorrect code or push the wrong buttons. Employee input is required to fix the mistakes.

The technology does offer companies proven benefits. As *Marketplace* reported, an early experiment by McDonald’s found that consumers spent an average of 30 percent more when using self-checkouts, possibly because they might be too embarrassed to upsize their order in front of the cashier.

Of course, the self-serve option saves money that would otherwise be spent by businesses to staff checkout lanes, supply desks, and kiosks. According to a report on self-service published by the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, the cost of an airline staff member check-in is \$3. The cost of a passenger checking in via a self-service kiosk is 14 cents.

For many consumers, it’s not about time savings or convenience; it’s about doing it yourself. These days, many shoppers prefer to take control of the process and navigate the checkout or check-in process by themselves.

## Offset Increased Drug Costs by Shopping Smart

Drug costs are rising – recently the cost of Medicare Part D prescription drug plans increased by 8 percent – but controlling the cost of medications can help offset these premium increases.

The first step is to talk with your doctor, who may not know your financial situation. Explore your drug cost options, including switching to a generic drug.

If you’re on specialty drugs, your doctor may have coupons for them. Also, many manufacturers of high-cost drugs offer a co-pay waiver plan. Ask your doctor, who also may be able to contact the manufacturer directly on your behalf.

Your health insurer may offer or require use of their partner mail-order pharmacy. When you’ve ensured the medication works, order a 90-day supply to save money.

If you shop at a drugstore, the cost can vary: shop smart with online help and don’t be shy about asking for cash discounts at your local pharmacy.

Many stores offer a reduced price through a membership card, and the Consumer Reports website has an online tool to compare drug costs. Individuals on Medicare with extremely low incomes may qualify for Medicare’s Extra Help program, which reduces their drug spend.

One of the best ways to cut drug costs on Medicare is to shop your prescription drug plan during open enrollment, starting in October of each year. At [Medicare.gov](http://Medicare.gov), you can compare your drug costs by plan so you can make the best plan choice for the meds you’ve been prescribed.

Another source of savings are FREE Rx discount/savings programs, eg. at [www.RxCut.com/abs](http://www.RxCut.com/abs) where you can find local pharmacies offering lowest “discount” prices for your meds. Savings also available at [www.GoodRx.com](http://www.GoodRx.com).

## “ALTERNATIVE NEWS”

### \$100 ‘QUIZ’ CONTEST:



The respondent with the first correct answer that we receive by mail or email, wins \$100. Include name and address in your response.

**Who was the first man to fly around the earth with a spaceship?**

By participating, winner gives permission to publish his or her name/town in our next issue.

# Life Changes May Affect Your Individual Health Insurance Coverage

There are life events that can qualify you for health coverage, under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). A life change may mean you can enroll outside of the ACA's Open Enrollment Period. But **don't delay; you must apply within sixty days of the life change (in most cases)**.

Some of the possible qualifying life events include the following:

- **Loss of Employer Group health coverage, Medicaid or CHIP coverage, or other minimum essential coverage (eg. when turn age 26)**
- Marriage or divorce, birth of baby or adoption
- Relocation from out of state, COBRA expiration, return from Military service
- Changes in citizenship/immigration status,
- Chapter 11 Bankruptcy
- etc... etc.

If you, your family/friends or business associates have a life change, talk to your Health Insurance agent. He/she may help you to determine eligibility, provide quotes on alternative plans and assist with the application process. Just remember that missing this **limited time opportunity** (as noted above) could result in having to wait until 2017 for coverage and possible ACA penalties.

## March's Contest Winner

We want to **congratulate** the winner of our \$100 March Newsletter contest.... **Alden Miller from New Boston**. Thanks for all that participated.

The answer to March's Quick Quiz was: Income Taxes

## Thanks for All Your Referrals!

Most of our business is from referrals, and we love the opportunity to help the friends, families and business associates of our valued clients.

We also send **FREE gift (or gift card)** for referrals that we end up quoting, so be sure to have them mention your name and email address. As always, thanks!!!

## Are You at Risk from 'Insurance Gaps?'

Do you have enough insurance to meet your – and your family's – needs now, and in the future?

If you don't, you are putting yourself at risk of serious financial trouble if something goes wrong with your health, your home, your job or your finances.

That's why I am offering you a free, no-obligation "Insurance Check-up" to make sure your insurance needs are adequately covered.

Depending on your needs and budget, an accident or cancer policy could help with high deductible plans; or maybe better Health coverage or doctor network if you have a small business; dental insurance which can be affordable; or low cost life insurance to protect your family, etc.

Just give my office a call at Ph: (603) 622-5700 or email us at [HealthPlanSavings@comcast.net](mailto:HealthPlanSavings@comcast.net) for your FREE review.

## Worth Reading

### The Self-Reliant Individual Is a Myth That Needs Updating

By Kimberley Brownlee  
*Aeon.co*

Self-sufficiency does not equal strength. As professor and author Kimberley Brownlee argues here, our Western cultural idolization of loners is misinformed. We praise Buddhist monks for shunning society—neglecting the fact that it takes years of training to become one, and forgetting that disciples look after their needs. Admire Henry David Thoreau's reflections on nature—but remember he lived close to a city. Nature itself shows the folly of pursuing complete isolation. Species need each other to survive. Most notably, this includes humans. **More:** <http://tinyurl.com/Loner-myth>

### How People Learn to Become Resilient

By Maria Konnikova  
*The New Yorker*

Anyone can become resilient. It's clear: resilience is formed and taught. What matters most is not what happens to someone, but how the person responds. When people learn to view challenges as opportunities, they learn resilience. **More:** <http://tinyurl.com/Learn-resilience>

### Are Women Undermining Themselves by Using Words Like "Sorry"?

By Tara Sophia Mohr  
*LinkedIn Pulse*

Tara Mohr's not apologizing for writing this. Here, she dissects why women are told not to use softening phrases like "I'm sorry," or "In my opinion." The challenge: competent women aren't seen as likable. She offers solutions. Can they work for men, too? Read this to find out. **More:** <http://tinyurl.com/Never-say-you-re-sorry>

# 10 Questions to Ask Yourself About Insurance

Life insurance can be an important component of a financial plan, but it's important for you to do your homework to ensure that you get the policy you need.

Here are 10 questions to ask yourself:

**Do you need life insurance?** The primary purpose of life insurance is to protect the people you leave behind - your spouse, children, or others who depend on you.

**Can you get coverage?** Be upfront when applying for coverage: If you don't, your claim may be disallowed, and your loved ones left with nothing.

**How much do you need?** Consider your family's income needs over the course of your policy. This includes expenses such as mortgage payments, college tuition, medical bills, and funeral costs.

**How much can you afford?** Many people who buy whole life insurance often buy too little, leaving themselves underinsured.

**What length should your term be?** The length of your term will depend on your long-term income outlook.

**Do you want any riders?** Disability and other waivers are available; be sure to look into them.

**Can you convert the policy?** If you

outlive your term life insurance policy, you may want to convert it near the end of the term so you won't need another medical exam to qualify.

**Is the insurance company stable?** Life insurance companies are usually in excellent financial health, but you should still check out their rating.

**Do you know how to shop for insurance?** Of course, you can buy life insurance on the Internet, but to find a policy that's tailored to your needs, consult your insurance advisor, who may be more familiar with options and your financial situation and goals.

## Quick Reminders for Individual Policy Holders

If you have a Health plan on (or off) the Federal Marketplace, some or all of the following may be important to note, as there tends to be more strict enforcement than pre-ACA:

**--Premiums:** Be aware...Late payments can result in late fees with some carriers, and even possible termination...and there may be **no reinstatement provisions** for cancellation due to non-pay, possibly resulting in **no health coverage** for the rest of 2016. The grace period may vary for those with or without a subsidy advance credit, as low as 30 days from due date.

**--Income tax filing:** If you got advance credits in 2014 or 2015, be sure that your tax return for that year included a form 8962 (subsidy reconciliation). Otherwise, you may lose future advance credits and may be subject to tax penalties... so be sure to get that 8962 filed if not done.

**--2016 Advance credits and estimated income:** If getting advanced credits and renewed from 2015, it may be advisable to calculate your adjusted gross income for 2016 to avoid owing on 2016 income taxes. With that, calculate your tax credit and compare to the advanced credit you are getting...and update income with the Marketplace if appropriate.

Check with your agent with questions on the above or for help in applying for income/subsidy updates, etc. with the Marketplace if necessary. If you do it on your own, let your agent know for follow up purposes.

## This Month's Smile: Funny Food Faux Pas

Have you ever worried about using the wrong fork? Relax.

According to SeriousEats.com and CalorieCount.com, that pales compared to these examples:

In Russia on business, an associate was taken out for an elegant dinner. Offered a selection of meats, but not knowing any Russian, he simply pointed toward the lamb and cried, "Baaah!"

A newlywed hoped to impress her groom with Italian cooking. Unfortunately, in preparing her first lasagna, she didn't realize she should boil the noodles before baking.

A nine-year-old was proud of herself for making her own toast with fancy blueberry bread, until her mom told her they didn't have blueberry bread; those dark "blueberry" spots were mold.

## Worth Quoting

**This month, some famous quotes on the topic of friends:**

Remember that the most valuable antiques are dear old friends.

H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

A real friend is one who walks in when the rest of the world walks out.

Walter Winchell

One of the most beautiful qualities of true friendship is to understand and to be understood.

Lucius Annaeus Seneca

It is one of the blessings of old friends that you can afford to be stupid with them.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Rare as is true love, true friendship is rarer.

Jean de La Fontaine

My best friend is the one who brings out the best in me.

Henry Ford

Things are never quite as scary when you've got a best friend.

Bill Watterson

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## Inside the Newsletter!

*Are You Being Served? (And Do You Really Want to Be?)*

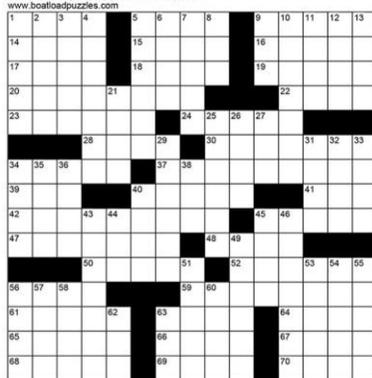
*Life Changes May Affect Individual Health Insurance Coverage*

*10 Questions to Ask Yourself About Insurance and.....*

*Quick Reminders for Individual Policyholders*

# Alternative Benefits

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### ACROSS

1. Support
5. Amtrak terminals (abbr.)
9. Map book
14. Buddhist monk
15. Dayton's locale
16. Brownish gray
17. Affirmative votes
18. Agrees silently
19. See eye to eye
20. Resume
22. Semester
23. Make certain
24. Skiing hill
28. At any \_\_\_\_
30. FDR's wife
34. 19th letters
37. Conclude
39. Spanish waterway
40. Counts calories
41. Showed the way

### DOWN

1. Location
2. Silklike cloth
42. Unreadable
45. Ringlet
47. Everlasting
48. Unusual
50. Measuring device
52. Undergo genetic alteration
56. Vocalist \_\_\_\_ Turner
59. Regarded highly
61. Sharp
63. Malicious look
64. Melody
65. Newspapers and TV, e.g.
66. On a cruise
67. Elm or pine
68. Construct
69. School table
70. Gels

3. Prophetic signs
4. Grazing ground
5. 14-line poem
6. Commandment start
7. Helpers
8. Help!
9. \_\_\_\_ snail's pace (2 wds.)
10. Wrestling duo (2 wds.)
11. Entice
12. Mimic
13. Look
21. Retirees' accts.
25. Mailbox item
26. Bullring cries
27. \_\_\_\_ capita
29. Safe to eat
31. River in Egypt
32. Wallet fillers
33. Cincinnati baseballers
34. \_\_\_\_ Canal
35. River sediment
36. Cobbler's concern
38. Snaky fish
40. Radio part
43. Inconsistent
44. Large antelope
45. Test answer
46. Quizzes again
49. US rail service
51. \_\_\_\_ Witherspoon of "Sweet Home Alabama"
53. Love, in Florence
54. Dogma
55. Borders
56. Docile
57. Bakery employee
58. Unclothed
60. Visualizes
62. Break a fast
63. Chap

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