

NEWS RELEASE

Oakland County Celebrates Milestone: \$9.1 Million in Medical Debt Abolished for More Than 14,000 Residents

- The program, conducted in partnership with the national nonprofit Undue Medical Debt, is designed to provide financial relief to those burdened by unpaid medical bills.
- Medical debt is a leading cause of bankruptcy in the U.S., affecting an estimated 114,000 Oakland County residents.
- Undue Medical Debt partners with health systems and other providers to identify eligible debts. Once identified, debts are purchased and forgiven, with recipients notified via an Undue branded envelope in the mail.

Dec. 17, 2024, Pontiac, Mich. – Oakland County Executive Dave Coulter and the Oakland County Board of Commissioners announce a major milestone in the county’s medical debt elimination program. Just in time for the holidays, the first batch of letters is being sent to more than 14,000 Oakland County residents, notifying them that a significant amount of medical debt - \$9.1 million - has been abolished. The letters are expected to arrive at the end of this week.

This is part of a [broader initiative](#) funded by Oakland County to eradicate up to \$200 million in medical debt for approximately 80,000 residents across the county using \$2 million in federal funding from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The program, conducted in partnership with the national nonprofit Undue Medical Debt, formerly RIP Medical Debt, is designed to provide financial relief to those burdened by unpaid medical bills. As new sources of medical debt are ready for relief, the county will make corresponding announcements.

“This is helping individuals and families pay off their medical debt and rehabilitate their credit scores, giving people the freedom to fully participate economically and live their best lives,” said Oakland County Executive David Coulter.

Medical debt is a leading cause of bankruptcy in the U.S., affecting an estimated 114,000 Oakland County residents. This program aims to ease that burden by identifying qualifying debts, purchasing them for pennies on the dollar and abolishing them.

Board of Commissioners Chair David T. Woodward emphasized the initiative’s significance.

“Shedding the heavy burden of medical debt can have a life-changing impact on our area families. We celebrate the milestone of helping more than 14,000 residents across the county,” said Chair David T.

Woodward (D-Royal Oak). “This initiative highlights our commitment to building a healthy and thriving community, lowering costs for working families and helping people achieve economic freedom.”

Undue Medical Debt, partners with health systems, individual hospitals and physicians’ groups to identify eligible debts. Qualifying debts are held by current residents of Oakland County earning at or below four times the federal poverty level or those whose medical debt exceeds 5 percent of their annual income. Once identified, debts are purchased and forgiven, with recipients notified via mail with a branded Undue envelope

“We’re very grateful to be working with Oakland County on this medical debt relief initiative which will bring much needed good news to thousands of residents this holiday season,” said Undue Medical Debt president and CEO Allison Sesso. “Medical debt is a financial and emotional burden that forces families to make difficult decisions and often prevents patients from getting the care they need. I hope this partnership can lift some of the burden and stigma associated with medical debt and we can work towards a future where no one avoids care for fear of cost.”

The ripple effects of this program extend beyond individual families. Medical debt elimination improves community health outcomes, strengthens the local economy and addresses systemic inequities.

Last March, with the support of Michigan Sen. Appropriations Chair Sarah Anthony, the state buttressed local medical debt forgiveness initiatives in Oakland, Wayne, Ingham and Kalamazoo counties with a \$4.5 million appropriation in the 2024 budget.

Medical debt relief is source-based, meaning qualifying debts can only be relieved if the provider that owns them is willing to partner on this initiative. Undue Medical Debt invites regional providers like hospitals to engage. As such, individuals are unable to request medical debt relief.

For more information about the medical debt abolition program or to learn about Undue Medical Debt, visit www.UndueMedicalDebt.org.