

# Life Insurance Buyer's Guide

This guide must be used in the following states:

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Note:

\* ME requires guide 100938 US for illustrated products and 105361 ME for non-illustrated products

# Life Insurance *Buyer's Guide*



INSURANCE



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*Prepared by the National Association of Insurance Commissioners*

The National Association of Insurance Commissioners is an association of state insurance regulatory officials. This association helps the various insurance departments to coordinate insurance laws for the benefit of all consumers.

This guide does not endorse any company or policy

## *Before You Buy Life Insurance*

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### ***Understand What Life Insurance Is***

Life insurance pays a death benefit if you die while the policy is in effect, in exchange for premiums you pay before your death. You can use the death benefit to protect against financial hardships such as loss of your income, funeral expenses, medical or nursing care expenses, debt repayments, and child care costs after your death. You can get information from the NAIC InsureU Life Insurance website --

[www.insureuonline.org/insureu\\_type\\_life.htm](http://www.insureuonline.org/insureu_type_life.htm)

### ***If You Need Life Insurance, Decide How Much Coverage to Buy***

How much life insurance to buy depends on the financial needs that will continue after your death. Examples include supporting your family, paying for child(ren)'s education, and paying off a mortgage. Some questions you may want to ask about your own needs include:

- Does anyone depend on me financially?
- How much of the family income do I provide?
- How will my family pay my final expenses and repay debts after my death?
- Do I want to leave money to charity or family?
- If I have life insurance through my employer, is it enough to meet my financial obligations?

The answers to these questions can help you decide how much coverage you need. An insurance agent, financial advisor, or insurance company representative can help you evaluate your insurance needs and give you information about available policies.

### ***If You Already Have Life Insurance, Assess Your Current Life Insurance Policy***

It's important to compare your current policy with any new policy you might buy. Keep in mind that you may be able to change your current policy to get benefits you want. Also, know that any changes in your health may impact your ability to get a new policy or the premium you'll pay. Don't cancel your current policy until you get the new one.

Also, while you may have free or low-cost life insurance through your employer, the death benefit usually is less than you need. And if you leave the employer, you may not be able to take this coverage with you.



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## *Compare the Different Types of Insurance Policies*

There are many types of life insurance policies. You should choose a policy with features that fit your individual needs. Some things to consider are:

- **Term Insurance vs. Cash Value Insurance.** Term insurance is intended to provide lower-cost coverage for a specific period of time (“a term”). If you want coverage for a longer period of time, such as for your lifetime, cash value insurance may be more cost effective. Most term policies don’t build up cash values that you can use in the future.

- **Renewable Term vs. Non-renewable Term.** Most term life insurance coverage can be continued (“renewed”) at the end of the term, even if your health has changed. If you renew a term policy, the new premiums are higher. Ask what the premiums will be before you renew the policy. Also ask if you’ll lose the right to renew the policy at a certain age. A Non-renewable term policy can’t be continued. You’ll have to apply for a new policy if you still want coverage.

- **Whole Life vs. Universal Life.** Whole life and universal life insurance are two types of cash value insurance. A key difference between the two is how you pay for the coverage. You typically pay premiums for whole life insurance according to a set schedule. In a universal life policy, you can choose a flexible premium payment pattern as long as you pay enough to keep your policy in force.

- **Variable Life vs. Non-variable Life.** The investments you will choose (such as stock and bond funds) in a variable life policy directly impact your cash value. These policies have the greatest potential to build cash value but also the greatest risk of losing cash value. Non-variable life policies often have guaranteed minimums for some features (interest or cash value, for example) but not all. Non-variable life policies also have less potential to build cash value than variable life policies.



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## ***Be Sure You Can Afford the Premium***

Before you buy a life insurance policy, be sure you can pay the premiums. Can you afford the initial premium? If the premium increases later, will you still be able to afford it? The premiums for many life insurance policies are sensitive to changes in the company's investment earnings, claims costs, and other expenses. If those are worse than expected, you may have to pay a much higher premium. Ask what might be the highest premium you'd have to pay to keep your coverage.

## ***Understand the Application Process***

You can apply for life insurance through life insurance agents, the mail, and online. In addition to basic information, such as your name, address, employer, job title, and date of birth, you'll be asked for more personal information. Depending on the type of policy, the insurer may require you to see a doctor, answer health-related questions, or have a medical professional come to your home or office to assess your health. Usually a policy that doesn't require detailed health information will cost more and provide less coverage than one that does.

It's important to tell the truth on the application. The insurance company will check your answers so review the application before you sign. If the insurance company discovers false statements on your application after it issues your policy, it could reduce or cancel your coverage.

## ***Choose a Beneficiary***

A beneficiary is the person(s) or organization(s) you name to receive your life insurance policy's death benefit. You'll need to know the Social Security or tax identification number for all beneficiaries. Experts advise you not to name a minor child as a beneficiary. Insurance companies won't pay a minor. Instead, consider leaving the money to your estate or trust.

## ***Evaluate the Future of Your Policy***

Does your policy have a cash value? In some cash value policies, the values are low in the early years but build later on. In other policies the values build up gradually over the years. Most term policies have no cash value. Ask your insurance agent, financial advisor, or an insurance company representative for an illustration showing future values and benefits.



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## *After You Buy Life Insurance*

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### *Read Your Policy Carefully*

After you carefully read your policy, you should be able to answer the following important questions:

- Is your personal information correct?
- Do premiums or policy values vary from year to year?
- What part of the premium or policy value isn't guaranteed?
- How will the timing of money paid and received affect any interest the policy might earn?

Your insurance agent, financial advisor, or an insurance company representative can help you understand anything that isn't clear.

If you're not satisfied with your new policy, you can return it for a full refund within a certain period, usually 10 days after you receive it. The review period usually is stated on the first page of the policy.

### *Review Your Life Insurance Program Every Few Years*

Review your policy with your insurance agent, financial advisor, or an insurance company representative every few years to keep up with changes in your policy and your needs.

- Have the premiums or benefits changed since your policy was issued?
- Do the death benefits still meet your needs?
- Do you need more or less coverage after life events, such as birth, adoption, marriage, job change, death, or divorce?

The insurance company can provide policy statements and illustrations to help with this review. As the policy owner, you can change beneficiaries at no cost. Be sure to review your beneficiaries every few years, especially after major life events that affect your life insurance needs.







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### ADDENDUM TO LIFE INSURANCE BUYER'S GUIDE

After you have decided which kind of life insurance fits your needs, look for a good buy. Your chances of finding a good buy are better if you use two types of index numbers that have been developed to aid in shopping for life insurance. One is called the "Surrender Cost Index" and the other is the "Net Payment Cost Index." It will be worth your time to try to understand how these indexes are used, but in any event, use them only for comparing the relative costs of similar policies. LOOK FOR POLICIES WITH LOW COST INDEX NUMBERS.

#### What is Cost?

"Cost" is the difference between what you pay and what you get back. If you pay a premium for life insurance and get nothing back, your cost for the death protection is the premium. If you pay a premium and get something back later on, such as a cash value, your cost is smaller than the premium.

The cost of some policies can also be reduced by dividends; these are called "participating" policies. Companies may tell you what their current dividends are, but the size of future dividends is unknown today and cannot be guaranteed. Dividends actually paid are set each year by the company.

Some policies do not pay dividends. These are called "guaranteed cost" or "nonparticipating" policies. Every feature of a guaranteed cost policy is fixed so that you know in advance what your future cost will be.

The premiums and cash values of a participating policy are guaranteed, but the dividends are not. Premiums for participating policies are typically higher than for guaranteed cost policies, but the cost to you may be higher or lower, depending on the dividends actually paid.

#### What are Cost Indexes?

In order to compare the cost of policies, you need to look at:

1. Premiums
2. Cash Values
3. Dividends

Cost Indexes use one or more of these factors to give you a convenient way to compare relative costs of similar policies. When you compare costs, an adjustment must be made to take into account that money is paid and received at different times. It is not enough to just add

up the premiums you will pay and to subtract the cash values and dividends you expect to get back. These indexes take care of the arithmetic for you. Instead of having to add, subtract and multiply and divide many numbers yourself, you just compare the index numbers which you can get from life insurance agents and companies.

1. **LIFE INSURANCE SURRENDER COST INDEX** - This index is useful if you consider the level of the cash values to be of primary importance to you. It helps you compare costs if at some future point in time, such as 10 or 20 years, you were to surrender the policy and take its cash value.
2. **LIFE INSURANCE NET PAYMENT COST INDEX** - This index is useful if your main concern is the benefits that are to be paid at your death and if the level of cash values is of secondary importance to you. It helps you compare costs at some future point in time, such as 10 or 20 years, if you continue paying premiums on your policy and do not take its cash value.

There is another number called the Equivalent Level Annual Dividend. It shows the part dividends play in determining the cost index of a participating policy. Adding a policy's Equivalent Level Annual Dividend to its cost index allows you to compare total costs of similar policies before deducting dividends. However, if you make any cost comparisons of a participating policy with a non-participating policy, remember that the total cost of the participating policy will be reduced by dividends, but the cost of the non-participating policy will not change.

### How Do I Use Cost Indexes?

The most important thing to remember when using cost indexes is that a policy with a small index number is generally a better buy than a comparable policy with a larger index number. The following rules are also important:

- (1) Cost comparisons should only be made between similar plans of life insurance. Similar plans are those which provide essentially the same basic benefits and require premium payments for approximately the same period of time. The closer policies are to being identical, the more reliable the cost comparison will be.
- (2) Compare index numbers only for the kind of policy, for your age and for the amount you intend to buy. Since no one company offers the lowest cost for all types of insurance at all ages and for all amounts of insurance, it is important that you get the indexes for the actual policy, age and amount which you intend to buy. Just because a Shopper's Guide tells you that one company's policy is a good buy for a particular age and amount, you should not assume that all of that company's policies are equally good buys.

- (3) Small differences in index numbers could be offset by other policy features, or differences in the quality of service you may expect from the company or its agent. Therefore, when you find small differences in cost indexes, your choice should be based on something other than cost.
- (4) In any event, you will need other information on which to base your purchase decision. Be sure you can afford the premiums, and that you understand its cash values, dividends and death benefits. You should also make a judgment on how well the life insurance company or agent will provide service in the future, to you as a policyholder.
- (5) These life insurance cost indexes apply to new policies and should not be used to determine whether you should drop a policy you have already owned for a while, in favor of a new one. If such a replacement is suggested, you should ask for information from the company which issued the old policy before you take action.

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