

Crisis Budgeting

The goal of the NeighborWorks Montana Network is to ensure that our communities are equipped with the knowledge and tools they need to remain in their homes and get the support they need to sustain. Please use this guide to help yourself navigate the uncertainties that come with being in crisis.

Food	You and your family must eat. Begin by meal planning and do an internet search for ways to stretch a food budget, find coupons, and plan inexpensive meals. We have also included a statewide list of food pantries in our resource section.
Shelter	If you can make these payments, they should still be a priority. You cannot just stop making your mortgage or rent payment. Work with your landlord or mortgage company immediately. See step two for a page to get you started. Then visit housing.mt.gov to learn about programs currently available for renters and homeowners.
Transportation	You may be able to defer your car payment depending on your lender, contact them directly.
Phone, Email, Video	Communication is key! Call your service providers directly to see if they are deferring payments, etc. Be sure to watch your email for messages from service providers as well.
Medications	Prescriptions and other health supplies are essential. Do not sacrifice your health during this stressful time. Read http://www.news.sanofi.us/What-to-Do-When-You-Cant-Afford-Your-Chronic-Disease-Medication or https://www.verywellhealth.com/what-to-do-when-you-cant-afford-your-medication-1942844 .
Insurance	Life still happens, do not let your insurance lapse. Call your provider for assistance or possibly less coverage for the short-term to keep yourself protected.
Utilities	It is best practice to call your provider to make them aware, as well as take advantage of assistance they may be offering.
Clothing	If you have clothing to wear and can make do for a few months this should be an expense that can be moved to a secondary priority or put on hold all together.
Estimate Bills	If your bills vary month to month, you can look at the last few months of payments and use an average to help set your budget.
Other bills	It is good to evaluate your need for some services during a time of crisis to lessen the burden to your household budget. Are there things you can cut out? Has the directive to stay at home already helped reduce your spending?

TIPS: If you cannot pay all your bills, prioritize by essential services. One technique is a rotation of paying each one as additional funds allow and making your way down the list with a single payment. This is after prioritizing essential needs and consequences of defaulting. Another is to divide any additional income by the number of bills and pay that amount to each. Here are a couple resources for processes:

- Dave Ramsey Article: <https://www.daveramsey.com/blog/what-to-do-when-you-cant-pay-your-bills>
- CPFEB - <https://www.consumerfinance.gov/about-us/blog/behind-bills-three-steps-help-you-make-tough-choices-tight-moments/>

YOU ARE PROTECTED: Personal and Credit Card Loans should **not** take precedence over shelter and food. The Fair Credit Collection Practices Act protects you from harassment or unethical debt collection practices. You cannot be threatened, subjected to violence or obscene language, they cannot contact you outside of the hours of 8 am and 9 pm, they cannot misrepresent who they are and they cannot contact your work if told verbally or in writing that is not allowed. For more information On Fair Credit Collection visit the FTC [HERE](#).

BEWARE OF SCAMS: Predatory lenders and Scammers will try to take advantage of this time of crisis. Always verify information and double check credibility of credit offers or bailout offers you get. The Federal Trade Commission has [tips to protect yourself from possible scams](#). Learn more about how to [prevent, recognize, and report fraud and scams](#).

Be careful of taking on more to credit to solve your problems. High interest loans, payday loans, other options may compound your problems long-term. <https://www.consumerfinance.gov/consumer-tools/payday-loans/> Please follow our steps and work with creditors before taking high interest or payday loans.



Emergency Budget Sheet

Income	April	May	June	July	August	September	October
Paycheck							
Unemployment							
Savings withdrawal							
Other sources:							
Total Income							
High Priority Budget Items							
Food (include pet food)							
Shelter (Mortgage/Rent)							
Medications (Rx and over the counter)							
Utilities (electricity, gas, sewer, garbage, etc.)							
Health Insurance (if not part of your paycheck)							
Transportation (payments, gas, maintenance, etc.)							
Phone & Internet							
Insurance (home/rental if not part of shelter total)							
Insurance (vehicle)							
Total							
Remaining (Income minus Total)							
<small>*If remaining balance is negative reach out to creditors, landlord and check 211.org resource listed in additional resources section for help in these areas.</small>							
Other expenses:	April	May	June	July	August	September	October
Household cleaning and paper supplies							
Toiletries							
Medical expenses							
Clothing							
Other							
Total							
Balance (Remaining funds minus other expense total)							
<small>*If balance is negative, go back and create a plan month-by-month to pay what you can when you can.</small>							