Life Insurance Buyer's Guide

This guide can help you get the most for your money when you shop for life insurance. It can help you answer questions about:

- Buying Life Insurance
- Deciding How Much You Need
- Choosing The Right Kind
- Finding a Low Cost Policy
- Things to Remember

Prepared by
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 coordinate insurance laws for the benefit of all consumers.

YOU ARE URGED TO USE THIS GUIDE WHEN BUYING LIFE INSURANCE

This Guide Does Not Endorse Any Company or Policy

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Buying Life Insurance

When you buy life insurance, you want coverage that fits your needs and doesn't cost too much.

First, decide how much you need — and for how long — and what you can afford to pay.

Next, find out what kinds of policies are available to meet your needs and pick the one that best suits you.

Then, find out what different companies charge for that kind of policy — for the amount of insurance you want. You can find important cost differences between life insurance policies by using *cost comparison indexes* as described in this guide.

It makes good sense to ask a life insurance agent or company to help you. An agent can be particularly useful in reviewing your insurance needs and in giving you information about the kinds of policies that are available. If one kind doesn't seem to fit your needs, ask about others.

This guide provides only basic information. You can get more facts from a life insurance agent or company or at your public library.

What About Your Present Policy? Think twice before dropping a life insurance policy you already have to buy a new one.

- It can be costly because much of what you paid in the early years of the policy you now have was used for the company's expense of selling and issuing the policy. This expense will be incurred again for a new policy.
- If you are older or your health has changed, premiums for the new policy will often be higher.

- You may have valuable rights and benefits in your present policy that are not in the new one.

- You might be able to change your present policy or even add to it to get the coverage or benefits you now want.

Check with the agent or company that issued your present policy — get both sides of the story. In any case, don't give up your present policy until you are covered by a new one.

How Much Do You Need?

To decide how much life insurance you need, figure out what your dependents would have if you were to die now, and what they would actually need. Your new policy should come as close to making up the difference as you can afford.

In figuring what you have, count your present insurance - including any group insurance where you work, social security or veteran's insurance. Add other assets you have - savings, investments, real estate, and personal property.

In figuring what you need, think of ~~income for~~ your dependents - for family living expenses, educational costs and any other future needs. Think also of cash needs - for the expenses of a final illness and for paying taxes, mortgages or other debts.

What Is The Right Kind?

All life insurance policies agree to pay an amount of money when you die. But all policies are not the same. Some provide permanent coverage and others temporary coverage. Some build up cash values and others do not. Some policies combine different kinds of insurance, and others let you change from one kind of insurance to another. Your choice should be based on your needs and what you can afford.

A wide variety of plans is being offered today. Here is a brief description of two basic kinds - term and whole life - and some combinations and variations. You can get detailed information from a life insurance agent or company.

Term Insurance covers you for a *term* of one or more years. It pays a death benefit only if you die in that term. Term insurance generally provides the largest immediate death protection for your premium dollar.

Most term insurance policies are *renewable* for one or more additional terms, even if your health has changed. Each time you renew the policy for a new term, premiums will be higher. Check the premiums at older ages and how long the policy can be continued.

Many term insurance policies can be traded before the end of a *conversion period* for a whole life policy - even if you are not in good health. Premiums for the new policy will be higher than you have been paying for the term insurance.

Whole Life Insurance covers you for as long as you live. The most common type is called *straight life* or *ordinary life* insurance - you pay the same premiums for as long as you live. These premiums can be several times higher than you would pay at first for the same amount of term insurance. But they are smaller than the premiums you would eventually pay if you were to keep renewing a term policy until your later years.

Some whole life policies let you pay premiums for a shorter period such as 20 years, or until age 65. Premiums for these policies are higher than for ordinary life insurance since the premium payments are squeezed into a shorter period.

Whole life policies develop cash values. If you stop paying premiums, you can take the cash — or you can use the cash value to buy continuing insurance protection for a limited time or a reduced amount. (Some term policies that provide coverage for a long period also have cash values.)

You may borrow against the cash values by taking a policy loan. Any loan and interest on the loan that you do not pay back will be deducted from the benefits if you die, or from the cash value if you stop paying premiums.

Combinations and Variations. You can combine different kinds of insurance. For example, you can buy whole life insurance for lifetime coverage and add term insurance for the period of your greatest insurance need. Usually the term insurance is on your life - but it can also be bought for your spouse or children.

Endowment insurance policies pay a sum or income to you if you live to a certain age. If you die before then, the death benefit is paid to the person you named as beneficiary.

Other policies may have special features which allow flexibility as to premiums and coverage. Some let you choose the death benefit you want and the premium amount you can pay. The kind of insurance and coverage period are determined by these choices.

One kind of flexible premium policy, often called *universal life*, lets you vary your premium payments every year, and even skip a payment if you wish. The premiums you pay (less expense charges) go into a policy account that earns

interest, and charges for the insurance are deducted from the account. Here, insurance continues as long as there is enough money in the account to pay the insurance charges.

Finding a Low Cost Policy

After you have decided which kind of life insurance is best for you, compare similar policies from different companies to find which one is likely to give you the best value for your money. A simple comparison of the premiums is not enough. There are other things to consider. For example:

- Do premiums or benefits vary from year to year?
- How much cash value builds up under the policy?
- What part of the premiums or benefits is not guaranteed?
- What is the effect of interest on money paid and received at different times on the policy?

Cost Comparison Index numbers, which you get from life insurance agents or companies, take these sorts of items into account and can point the way to better buys.

Cost Comparison Indexes. There are two types of cost comparison index numbers. Both assume you will live and pay premiums for the next 10 or 20 years.

1. The *Surrender Cost Comparison Index* helps you compare costs over a 10 or 20 year period assuming you give up (surrender) the policy and take its cash value at the end of the period. It is useful if you consider the

level of cash values to be of special importance to you.

2. The *Net Payment Cost Comparison Index* helps you compare costs over a 10 or 20 year period assuming you will continue to pay premiums on your policy and do not take its cash value. It is useful if your main concern is the benefits that are to be paid at your death.

The two index numbers are the same for a policy without cash values.

Nonguaranteed Element. Many policies have a *nonguaranteed element* — some because they pay dividends and others because the company has the right to change premiums or benefits from time to time. In these cases, the index numbers are based on the company's current scale of dividends, premiums or benefits. These scales can be changed after the policy is issued, so that the actual dividends, premiums or benefits over the years can be higher or lower than those assumed in the indexes. The *nonguaranteed element* tells you how much higher the *Surrender Cost Comparison Index* would be if it were calculated using only guaranteed numbers.

Some policies do not have a *nonguaranteed element* at all. They are called *guaranteed cost* or *fixed cost* policies. This means that the premiums and benefits are fixed at the time you buy the policy and will not change.

Using Cost Comparison Indexes. The most important thing to remember is that a policy with smaller index numbers is generally a better buy than a similar policy with larger index numbers.

Compare index numbers only for similar policies - those which provide essentially the same benefits, with premiums payable for the same length of time. Make sure they are for your age,

and for the kind of policy and amount you intend to buy. Remember that no one company offers the lowest cost at all ages for all kinds and amounts of insurance.

Small differences in index numbers should be disregarded, particularly where there is a *nonguaranteed element*. Also, small differences could easily be offset by other policy features, or differences in the quality of service from the agent or company. When you find small differences in the indexes, your choice should be based on something other than cost.

Finally, keep in mind that index numbers cannot tell you the whole story. You should also consider:

- The pattern of policy benefits. Some policies have low cash values in the early years that build rapidly later on. Other policies have a more level cash value build-up. A year-by-year display of values and benefits can be very helpful. (The agent or company will give you a Policy Summary that will show benefits and premiums for selected years.)

- Any special policy features that may be particularly suited to your needs.

- The methods by which nonguaranteed values are calculated. For example, interest rates are an important factor in determining policy dividends. In some companies dividends reflect the average interest earnings on all policies whenever issued. In others, the dividends for policies issued in a recent year, or a group of years, reflect the interest earnings on those policies; in this case, dividends are likely to change more rapidly when interest rates change.

Things to Remember

- Review your particular insurance needs and circumstances. Choose the kind of policy with benefits that most closely fit your needs: Ask an agent or company to help you.

- Be sure that the premiums are within your ability to pay. Don't look only at the initial premium, but take account of any later premium increase.

- Ask about cost comparison index numbers and check several companies which offer similar policies. Remember, smaller index numbers generally represent a better buy.

- Don't buy life insurance unless you intend to stick with it. It can be very costly if you quit during the early years of the policy.

- Read your policy carefully. Ask your agent or company about anything that is not clear to you.

- Review your life insurance program with your agent or company every few years to keep up with changes in your income and your needs.

APPENDIX B

Examples of Calculations of the Discontinuity Index

Example 1

The first example is a participating whole life policy issued to a male aged 35. The calculation is made on a per $1,000 basis:

Policy Year	Guaranteed Cash Value	Illustrated Annual Dividend	Illustrated Terminal Dividend	Premium
1	0.0	0.0	0.00	21.40
2	8.77	2.40	0.00	21.40
3	31.27	2.65	0.00	21.40
4	54.28	2.90	0.00	21.40
5	77.82	3.16	0.00	21.40
6	94.24	3.16	0.00	21.40
7	110.93	3.16	0.00	21.40
8	127.88	3.41	0.00	21.40
9	145.09	3.41	0.00	21.40
10	162.54	3.66	8.00	21.40
11	180.22	4.16	8.00	21.40
12	198.11	4.67	8.00	21.40
13	216.20	5.17	8.00	21.40
14	234.46	5.68	8.00	21.40
15	252.88	6.18	8.00	21.40
16	271.43	6.69	8.00	21.40
17	290.10	7.19	8.00	21.40
18	308.87	7.95	8.00	21.40
19	327.73	8.46	8.00	21.40
20	346.65	9.47	25.00	21.40
21	365.62	10.48	25.00	21.40
22	384.60	11.49	25.00	21.40
23	403.57	12.50	25.00	21.40
24	422.50	13.51	25.00	21.40
25	441.37	14.52	25.00	21.40
26	460.14	15.53	25.00	21.40
27	478.78	16.54	25.00	21.40
28	497.28	17.55	25.00	21.40
29	515.60	18.56	25.00	21.40
30	533.70	19.57	25.00	21.40

The yearly prices, (backward) second differences in yearly prices, and their squares for this policy are:

Policy Year	(1) Yearly Price	(2) Second Difference in Yearly Price	(3) Second Difference Squared
1	21.40	–	NA
2	10.76	–	NA
3	-2.13	-2.25	NA
4	-1.79	13.23	NA
5	-1.44	.01	NA
6	6.46	7.55	NA
7	6.98	-7.38	NA
8	7.29	-.21	.0441
9	7.85	.25	.0625
10	.59	-7.82	61.1524
11	8.72	15.39	236.8521
12	8.88	-7.97	63.5209
13	9.06	.02	.0004
14	9.28	.04	.0016
15	9.52	.02	.0004
16	9.78	.02	.0004
17	10.08	.04	.0016
18	10.15	-.23	.0529
19	10.47	.25	.0625
20	-5.84	-16.63	276.5569
21	11.05	33.20	1,102.2400
22	10.98	-16.96	287.6416
23	10.93	.02	.0004
24	10.91	.03	NA
25	10.91	.02	NA
26	10.94	.03	NA
27	11.00	.03	NA
28	11.06	.00	NA
29	11.15	.03	NA
30	11.27	.03	NA

The column (1) yearly prices are the values of the Yearly Price of Death Benefits per (1000).

Column (2) is calculated by subtracting the change observed in the yearly price in year c-1 from the change observed in the yearly price in year t. For example, the second difference of -16.63 in year 10 is calculated:

-16.63 = (-5.84-10.47) - (10.47-10.15)

= -16.31-.32

= -16.63

Column (3), second difference spuared, is the square of the figure in column (2). The sum of the squared second differences between years 8 and 23 is 2028. This sum exceeds by 1528 the test limit for issue age 35 of 500.

The second example is a guaranteed cost policy issued to a male age 25. It has a six percent policy loan rate. The calculation is made on a per $1,000 basis.

Example 2

Policy Year	Guaranteed Cash Value	Illustrated Annual Dividend	Illustrated Terminal Dividend	Premium
1	0.0	0.0	0.0	11.34
2	0.0	0.0	0.0	11.34
3	0.02	0.0	0.0	11.34
4	9.77	0.0	0.0	11.34
5	19.84	0.0	0.0	11.34
6	30.23	0.0	0.0	11.34
7	40.95	0.0	0.0	11.34
8	52.01	0.0	0.0	11.34
9	63.41	0.0	0.0	11.34
10	75.17	0.0	0.0	11.34
11	87.27	0.0	0.0	11.34
12	99.71	0.0	0.0	11.34
13	112.48	0.0	0.0	11.34
14	125.54	0.0	0.0	11.34
15	138.90	0.0	0.0	11.34
16	152.53	0.0	0.0	11.34
17	166.43	0.0	0.0	11.34
18	180.59	0.0	0.0	11.34
19	195.03	0.0	0.0	11.34
20	224.12	0.0	0.0	11.34
21	230.80	0.0	0.0	11.34
22	253.71	0.0	0.0	11.34
23	268.85	0.0	0.0	11.34
24	284.20	0.0	0.0	11.34
25	299.73	0.0	0.0	11.34
26	315.43	0.0	0.0	11.34
27	331.29	0.0	0.0	11.34
28	347.29	0.0	0.0	11.34
29	363.43	0.0	0.0	11.34
30	379.67	0.0	0.0	11.34

Policy Year	(1) Yearly Price	(2) Second Difference in Yearly Price	(3) Second Difference Squared
1	11.34	–	NA
2	11.34	–	NA
3	11.32	-.02	NA
4	2.06	-9.24	NA
5	2.21	9.41	NA
6	2.33	.03	NA
7	2.57	.00	NA
8	2.76	.01	.0001
9	2.96	.01	.0001
10	3.16	.00	.0000
11	3.40	.04	.0016
12	3.65	.01	.0001
13	3.93	.03	.0009
14	4.26	.05	.0025
15	4.59	.00	.0000
16	4.97	.05	.0025
17	5.37	.02	.0004
18	5.78	.01	.0001
19	6.19	.00	.0000
20	-7.08	-17.68	187.1424
21	15.65	36.00	1,296.0000
22	.51	-37.87	1,434.1369
23	9.00	23.63	558.3769
24	9.52	-7.97	NA
25	10.08	.04	NA
26	10.66	.02	NA
27	11.26	.02	NA
28	11.88	.02	NA
29	12.51	.01	NA
30	13.18	.04	NA

The sum of the squared second differences between years 8 and 23 for example two is 3476. It exceeds by 3176 the test limit for issue age 25 of 300.

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APPENDIX C

Test Limits for Discontinuity

Drafting Note: *The test limits for discontinuity contained in this Appendix were developed by the NAIC Advisory Committee on Manipulation to be applicable to the traditional type of whole life policy. Corresponding test limits need to be developed for other plans. Also, further refinement in the test limits for issue ages over 45 appears necessary.*

Issue Age	Test Limit	Issue Age	Test Limit
25 and under	300	36	515
26	325	37	528
27	348	38	541
28	371	39	552
29	392	40	563
30	413	41	572
31	432	42	581
32	451	43	588
33	468	44	595
34	485	45 and over	600
35	500		

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ATTACHMENT ONE-B

Suggested Revisions to Buyers Guide (ACLD Redraft)

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What Is Cost?

"Cost" is the difference between what you pay and what you get back. If you pay 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.

For some policies all of the cost elements are guaranteed. These are called "guaranteed cost" or "fixed cost" policies. For many policies there is a nonguaranteed cost element. See the paragraph entitled "Non-guaranteed Element" for a description of this element and its effect on "cost."

Notes: Insert above on p. 6 of revised guide just above the paragraph entitled "Cost Comparison Indexes."

Delete the last paragraph of the section "Non-Guaranteed Element" on p. 7 of the revised guide.

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