

THE THRIVING ABROAD PODCAST

**#Episode 71: A Guide to International
Health Insurance for Expats: Advice to Help
You Get it Right**

With

Louise Wiles and David G. Tompkins

Transcript



The image shows a podcast cover for 'Thrivng Abroad Podcast Episode 72'. On the left is a portrait of David G. Tompkin, a man in a suit and tie. To the right of the portrait, the text reads 'Thrivng Abroad Podcast Episode 72'. Below this, a red banner contains the text 'A Guide to Expat International Health Insurance: Advice to help you get it right'. At the bottom right, it says 'With Louise Wiles'. Below the portrait, the name 'David G. Tompkin' and the website 'www.ExpatFinancial.com' are listed.

Thrivng Abroad Podcast
Episode 72

A Guide to Expat International
Health Insurance:
Advice to help you
get it right

David G. Tompkin
www.ExpatFinancial.com

With Louise Wiles

Welcome

Thanks for downloading the transcript from today's conversation. Below are some questions to help you reflect on the content of this conversation on: The Expat Laptop Lifestyle.

If you would like to learn more about us, have some questions, or would simply like to start a conversation with us our contact details are given below.

The questions we ask ourselves, shape our lives. Here are some questions prompted by this conversation:

- In light of the pandemic, are there new risks that you need to insure?
- For group policies, are you able to offer protection in relation to safety and security such as war and terrorism, kidnap/ransom cover, pre-existing conditions and also life assurance and disability benefits?
- Does the travel insurance you or your company provides adequately cover for Covid -19 related medical issues?
- For individual expats, what level of cover makes sense for you? What are the benefits of a global health plan?
- What level of cover/deductibles makes sense given your medical history and location? It is important to think forward to future moves and the cover that may be required then as well.

About David G. Thompkins

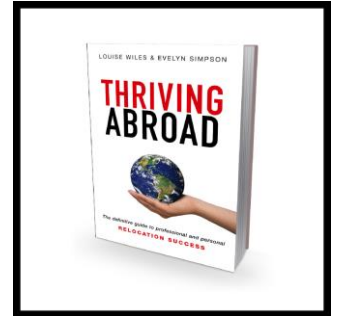
David Tompkins is President of TFG Global Insurance Solutions Ltd, which owns & operates Expat Financial, which is a leading source for international health insurance, expat life & disability coverage, and other international insurance plans for individual expatriates and global employers.

David has fused his expertise in insurance with expatriate's need for an independent source of global insurance. David has been in the insurance business since January 1991 and is a Chartered Life Underwriter (CLU). David's firm has become one of the top sources for expatriate insurance. TFG Global is also a leading expatriate group insurance and special risk insurance brokerage in Canada with clients around the world. David has been interviewed, spoken and been interviewed widely. This includes the Globe & Mail and the NY Times. David has also been active in special risk insurance with clients around the world, including hot spots like Iraq and Afghanistan.

- For Information about Individual Expat Health Insurance go [HERE](#)
- For Corporate Plans go [HERE](#)

About Podcast Host: Louise Wiles

- Louise is an expat change and transition coach with professional experience as a learning and development specialist and personal performance coach, with a Master's in Occupational Psychology from the University of Leicester (UK).
- Louise has lived and worked across Europe moving internationally seven times in the past twenty years. Louise recently published the book: *Thriving Abroad: The definitive guide to professional and personal relocation success*. Buy a copy [HERE](#) - use the code THRIVING20 to access a 20% discount and register to download the associated workbook for free [HERE](#). You can get in touch with Louise [HERE](#)



TRANSCRIPT

Louise Wiles 00:13

Hello, David, and welcome to the Thriving Abroad conversation. Just to give people an idea of a bit about bit about you, where you're sitting talking to us from today and a little bit about what's led you to be working in the field that you work in, which is supporting expats in insurance and their financial needs.

David Tompkins 00:36

That's kind of a pleasure being available for your chat today. Yes, it's David Tompkins. So, with TFG Global Insurance Solutions Ltd. We own and operate Expat financial, which is basically our marketing arm for international insurance for individual expatriates, as well as companies, multinationals, organisations, NGOs, that are sending expatriates abroad. Basically, I've been in the insurance business as a broker, independent insurance broker since 1991. Based in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, but we work with clients around most of the world. Got my start in the expat, side in around 2000. We had some corporate clients that needed some insurance for some clients that were operating in a pretty sketchy part of Africa at the time. And we were able to source coverage for them. And then, you know, I thought, well, we should maybe look at starting a website. And then a lot of the services that we offer came from expatriates that were living abroad or companies that would ask you, do you do this? do you do that? And so we would add the services. So yeah, so as I said, we work with both corporate and individual expats.

Louise Wiles 02:06

Brilliant, Great, well, so today for this conversation then, as a highly practical one really for for the audience. I want to really focus on health insurance, something that is really, really important for anyone moving abroad, particularly brought into acute focus, I think, with the pandemic at the moment. And I want to look at it from two perspectives. So, from the perspective of international organisations who are running and or setting up and running group programmes for mobile employees, but then also, to talk a little bit about how individua; expats can go about organising their own insurance and what they should be thinking about as they talk to people like you about setting up the best plans for

themselves. So, let's start with the international organisation. I think the pandemic has certainly focus international organisations attention on duty of care for their mobile employees. I mean, I think that existed before, but it has been brought into right up the agenda because of the pandemic. So, when it comes to health care, what do organisations need to be thinking about in terms of making sure that they're providing the best support and benefits for their employees?

David Tompkins 03:25

So. I would say, I agree with that. The covid-19 pandemic is certainly sharpened the focus on duty of care. I've seen most expatriate employers are definitely focused on this topic, as they should be. Also, most global insurers that I work with have been quite proactive on the epidemic. Most expat benefit plans do not have a pandemic exclusion, they will treat COVID as any other illness. Another issue is medical evacuation is certainly been made much more complex such as evacuating employee to a country which has a travel restriction. From a business travel insurance perspective, which we also offer, only a few capable varieties in the market are able to fully cover COVID related claims. Then you also have the expatriates who are stranded and possibly higher risk for employees around the world due to the COVID pandemic, as you see possibly a social disorder, more crime, etc. I generally, if some people were stranded if the employer had a you know, a really good global, benefit plan with international health care then they would normally put them on that plan. And yeah, so it certainly has sharpened the focus of duty of care. But, it's not just you know, health care you've got you know, special risk insurance can have ransom, life insurance, disability. Yeah, they're all important issues nowadays.

Louise Wiles 05:03

Yeah, yeah. Yeah. So, just thinking specifically for a moment about this a pandemic issue and and just as you said, you know, so being covered for COVID, or pandemic related issues for business travellers. I mean, I imagine that is quite a big issue for, for so many companies, because I'm just thinking about quarantine countries that have testing on entry, for example, which increasingly is happening, you know, and suddenly discovering you are Covid positive as you enter a country if you're going on business trip, for example. And then, being sure that you are covered for that, in that country. And you have health cover for that, is really important, I would imagine.

David Tompkins 05:50

Yeah, definitely.

Louise Wiles 05:52

So, that would be a separate travel insurance for mobile employees or business travellers?

David Tompkins 05:58

Yes, for business travel coverage. Those are normally for employees that are going for less than six months, where you're going to be keeping them on their domestic health insurance programme. They're not becoming expats. But they were essentially going to be on something short term where they just need emergency care only. So yeah, those are, and usually, as long as you provide the overall business travel over the coming year, you can usually get a policy that will cover all business travel throughout the year for a single premium.

Louise Wiles 06:41

Right. And it would include COVID within that?

David Tompkins 06:44

It should not all of them do, though,

Louise Wiles 06:47

Okay, well, it's kind of makes me think there's perhaps something that people and companies need to be checking, because I guess there probably are companies out there that are making some assumptions around what's covered for their, for their employees.

David Tompkins 06:58

Yeah. Generally, if the employer got an 'off the shelf', so to speak, consumer based travel insurance plan, there's a very good chance that it does not cover COVID. But, if it's a really good business travel plan, it should cover COVID. But the other things you could cover, you know, would cover war and terrorism, does it cover pre-existing conditions medical conditions, those types of things? And generally, when you're pulling the risk, you can provide better rates and superior coverage for business trips.

Louise Wiles 07:33

Okay. I suppose that brings me on to my next question, which is, you know, I imagine companies when they're putting together their health insurance group programme, you know, there is a blanket approach to those. And that, you know, covers the majority, I suppose, for the majority of normal risks. But what, challenges do you see companies facing in terms of exceptional risk or, you know, different situations that the companies haven't covered? Do you come across people who find themselves stuck somewhere uninsured because their group policy doesn't extend to that risk?

David Tompkins 08:13

Yeah, we do come across it, you get situations where you have an employee being sent overseas, and maybe their domestic, maybe their international health insurance plan does not cover the person's pre-existing medical condition, which is usually the number one way of an insured, getting out of paying a global health claim. If it's a good usually if you have enough people on the on the plan, and depending on the share, you should be able to cover the pre-existing conditions. So, someone you know, even if you have someone you're hiring, you may do some sort of corporate medical before they go abroad. But you know, they might have high blood pressure, but it doesn't mean you're not going to hire them. But if they have a heart attack, the insurer might not cover that claim because it's a pre-existing condition. Another big one we find is that someone's going abroad, and their partner is pregnant. And their policy that they might have in place might have a nine, or 12 month waiting period for pregnancy related expenses. But, if they're part of a decent sized expat group, or depending on the plan, that waiting period should be able to be to be waived. Yep, so it's certainly like situations where someone didn't take an expat assignment because the global health care coverage was not sufficient or didn't cover their requirements. There have been situations where I've seen, I've talked to individual expats and they have, you know, they've been charged to get their own health coverage by the expat

employer. And, because they had a pre-existing condition, they weren't able to get, you know, health coverage because all individual expat health plans, they're all usually medically underwritten. So, they may cover you with a loading, a premium loading or provide an exclusion for pre-existing condition, or simply decline you. Whereas, if you have a group expat plan, usually those plans will cover everyone, regardless of their medical history. Generally, if you have a decent enough size of a group, but that size depends on the insurer and the plans and where the policy is domiciled.

Louise Wiles 10:58

Yeah. Okay. So, if I, you know, an HR director, just reviewing my health care plan at the moment, or perhaps looking for a new one? What are the broad categories of cover you would recommend I think about? Can you kind of give me a quick summary of the different areas when you mentioned, including also life insurance and so on. So, what kind of package do you recommend broadly, a company looks at and builds up?

David Tompkins 11:31

On a on a corporate level. I mean, generally, there's varying levels of coverage for international health care for the employees. Usually, the plans will either include or exclude the United States. And some plans will provide options for both, because you might have an expat in the United States, you might have an American expatriate, they generally will want to be covered for medical treatment in the United States. And that certainly adds to as to your cost versus non-American expatriates. Most will want to have a plan that fully covers inpatient care, which is care, you know, in a hospital, outpatient care, wellness. You know, we should it should cover chronic conditions. Medical evacuation is obviously very key, dental, vision, international Employee Assistance Programmes have definitely become very popular. And definitely good part of your duty care. But generally, they as well, I would say most expat employers will provide a global health plan that does not have any deductibles. There might be some cost sharing, but it certainly adds a bit of a complication and it gets most expatriates, you know, your it is somewhat of a hardship sometimes in your going abroad. There are expectations that they won't have to pay much out of pocket. Probably, I think the biggest consideration, is that obviously have the coverage with a well-known, respected insurer that has a really robust medical network around the world. That the expat if they're going to a hospital, they could just show their card and get direct reimbursement instead of having to pay out of pocket. I would say most expat employees hate to pay out of pocket, which we all probably do, but especially with, I would say expat employees. And then generally, obviously, the packages will include, you know, might include some life insurance, Accidental Death and Dismemberment. Probably, the standard is two or three times earnings. Some expat employees will also provide Long Term Disability. But that's generally well overlooked for a lot of expat employers. What else I guess there's also probably a very key component nowadays, especially with COVID is, having a global benefit plan that includes telehealth. So, someone's got something minor. They don't have to go to a doctor's office or hospital for that they can get some, you know, call up a doctor on their computer or iPhone, and maybe show them a rash that they have. And then they can get some advice on next steps. So that's definitely become more popular.

Louise Wiles 14:36

Brilliant. Great. That gives a good overview. And then, um, and then some of the additional things you were talking about with security risks, depending on where people are being sent to, so the more dangerous areas of the world.

David Tompkins 14:51

Yeah. I mean, it's, I would say for expat employers. I would recommend that they not rely on their corporate business travel plans that, may or may not have some kidnap and ransom coverage included. Because those plans are generally pretty deficient to put it, to put it lightly, they really won't do the job. So, you want to get a comprehensive, special risk programme that doesn't just cover, kidnap and ransom, which is obviously key, but it would cover things such as disappearance, security, evacuation, as well as extortion, threats, express, kidnapping, all that type of thing, something pretty comprehensive, because it's, and we've, you know, I've had some clients unfortunately, impacted by these situations. It's usually not the ransom is usually not that big, you know, might be, you know, if there's some part of some sketchy part of the world, if you want to put it that way. The ransom might only be, you know, come out at the end of the day only, you know, \$100,000 or \$200,000, for example, but it's the consultant fees, that are, you know, that are paid by the insurer. And those can add up to you know, 1 million, 2 million dollars, because you might have sent someone some negotiator, coordinator into that country for months, maybe even a year or two, you know, get a successful return of the, of that expat employer or business traveller. So, yeah, definitely important.

Louise Wiles 16:33

Yeah. Well, I think that this is a really good overview of what should be being thought about. And I think, perhaps a reminder for all employees, even though your company, provides you with a group policy, to take the time to really understand what's actually covered within that and make sure that if you have special medical risks, that you know, those you know, that those will be covered for you. Because it's easy to assume that it's there, but if you haven't checked it, you may find it's not. Okay, so turning to individual expats, then. You know, there's a huge array of policies and benefits on offer. And it can be quite mind boggling when you start to research it for yourself. What are the mistakes that you see expats making when they start doing their own research, and thinking about how they can help how they cover themselves?

David Tompkins 17:33

Some of the common mistakes, when you're talking about individual international health insurance. They, you know, they might get a policy that doesn't cover pregnancy related expenses. Because usually, with the plan they're sold, usually like three levels, for example, a silver, gold and platinum, and maybe the gold and platinum might cover pregnancy related expenses that will cover them after a nine month or 12 month waiting period. So that's one, so if you or your partner may become pregnant, there's even a faint chance you might want to get a policy that covers pregnancy related expenses. I think as well, sometimes expats will, I deal with a lot of expatriates that go down to the Caribbean, for example, Mexico, sometimes they will, you know, for cost reasons and it's understandable that they won't get a policy that covers United States. But, I think if you can afford it, it's a good idea, if you're living in those regions to get a policy that fully covers medical treatment in the United States, because, it's a good chance, if you get something really serious that the local country may or may not be able to adequately treat you. So, you're going to want to go somewhere where you can be treated and the

nearest place might be for example, in the Caribbean, you might be going to Miami for for medical treatment. So, that's a you know, certainly key consideration. I mean, ultimately, it's really you get what you pay for. Generally, you will get the more you probably paying the better off the coverage usually is. I mean, there's some variations, but you know, I would say just get the best coverage that you can certainly afford. Another common mistake is that we find people that will get emergency travel medical insurance, even though they're living abroad for a year or more. Those can again, travel insurance is really just emergency only it doesn't cover you back in your country of citizenship, where a lot of people would want to get treated or will be visiting. And generally, if you're an expat, you're going to be losing your domestic coverage in your country of citizenship. Or the plans don't carry outside Country citizenship. So, you would want to get a plan, go for a global health plan. If you're going to be abroad for at least a year or more, you know. Some expats will also, you know, possibly they'll just go on the domestic plan in the country they're going to. And you know, sometimes you don't have a choice, you have to and sometimes it is a very good choice, depending on the country you're in. But more often than not, expats are globally mobile, so the problem is, if you go to that country going on the domestic plan and you didn't get an international plan, and you go to a new country, that policy won't be portable. So, in that situation should have probably got a global health.

Louise Wiles 20:50

And then you've got to start again, in the new country. I guess one of the things that I, you know, having had international policies when we've been abroad, you know, the annual discussion over rates, I mean, every year, there seems to be an increase in premium. And we always seem to trade, excess for premium, or to maintain our premium we trade excess. And so in the end, you end up with ridiculous excesses. Any advice or recommendations about how, how people deal with that?

David Tompkins 21:25

Yeah, I mean, that's the thing about medical insurance in general, and international is the same, there's a global trend of, you know, somewhere, but you know, depending on the insurer or, you know, maybe 9% - 11%, sometimes even higher, depending on the countries that you're in. So, you will see that rate creep from the insurers. You also have, of course, the rates are also dependent on where you are, and also how old you are. And as you people age, their rates go up as well. Certainly, as you say, the best, you know, sometimes, if you were starting, for example, at a platinum level, you might reduce the plan to a gold level. The insurance will generally allow you to reduce coverage without asking any medical questions or underwriting. But once you increase coverage, they will want to ask medical questions, and the change may or will be subject to add to your medical evidence. But certainly, as you say, deductibles will be a way of reducing your coverage. But, I'm always very cautious people that they should be cautious about changing plans, especially if they have developed a new pre-existing condition. You have to be careful about changing to a new insurer, because that new insurer may decide, you know, may exclude that condition that was covered under your old policy, or they may decline you, so, definitely be careful when you're changing health insurance. It's always an option, but I do definitely be careful.

Louise Wiles 23:02

And I mean, one of the things that has always been an issue and so talked about is the whole claims experience. And I think, often, rather than the discussion being about the benefits of different policies, it

comes down to what's their claim experience like? In my experience, some will be horrendous, and others better? What tips do you have for people about managing the claims experience? Because I guess the whole way in which you approach it will help. Do you have any tips on that?

David Tompkins 23:35

Oh, sure, I will definitely try to give you something. In the event of a medical claim you your family members should contact the insurer as soon as possible to arrange for direct payment or reimbursement of the hospital claims. Most outpatient claims, unless you're going to a provider in the insurance network are paid by the insured and then submitted, the claim should be submitted online or offline. But online is always better, because it'd be a lot faster, especially relying on the mail, especially if you can have the payment wired to your bank account. Generally, that's why you generally want to go with a global health insurer that has a very large medical network. And you can usually ask to, you know, if you're going to be in Cartagena, for example, you might ask the provider or the international insurance broker, which insurers have the best network there, because that's definitely gonna make your life easier if you do have a claim. But again, a lot of medical facilities around the world just don't, for whatever reason, you know, they just don't have any international connections. They don't want to deal with health insurance. You may have to pay out of pocket, but sometimes you could also call the insurer and ask for a guarantee of payment. That's essentially a letter that would be provided to the facility that, you know, look, this person is insured, they're going to be covered, and we're going to guarantee that we're going to pay for their claims. But also, it also makes it a good idea to get getting the health insurer in place, especially if they're a good one, they can maybe provide second opinions, maybe they would recommend a different facility. Maybe they would say, no, maybe you shouldn't get that treatment, you should get a different treatment and may not be because of reduced costs it may be because you know, the treatment at the facility you're in, that they're recommending is not advisable, maybe you should get that done elsewhere, for example, as well as maybe you need to be medically evacuated.

Louise Wiles 25:51

Right? So always involve your insurer in the conversation right from the beginning, so that your treatment options and what's available and whether that's right for you. Um, anything else that you think people need to know about arranging their own insurance. or have we covered it all?

David Tompkins 26:15

I would say again, most of these most of these global health plans for individual expats, they usually two or three or four levels. Most plans will allow you to get the base level coverage, which is anything done at a hospital, then you add the outpatient care, the wellness care, the vision and dental, and again, you have different deductibles, you would be covered globally, excluding or including the US, or maybe if you're in Africa, there's some insurers that would just cover you in Africa. Some expats we find that are in developing countries where local medical care, especially outside of hospitals, really inexpensive, they, to save money, they will go with a policy that just covers inpatient care, and they would self-insure the outpatient care, because the outpatient modules that you can add your policies certainly add to the costs quite significantly. So, that's something that we do see a lot for some expats. Obviously, you get a large deductible, because you want to essentially, self-insure the first you know,

\$300 to £1000 to even, I see some expats that just get it like a \$10,000 deductible. they're comfortable with with that risk, but they want to cover anything, you know, really big claims.

Louise Wiles 27:42

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I certainly that's what we've done away that we've paid the first consultation or second year up until it gets taken further into investigations and then covered by the insurance, so, one way of keeping prices down.

David Tompkins 27:59

I would say definitely, you know, more often than not, you should get medical evacuation as an option. Again, especially if you're living in a region that has, you know, substandard medical care.

Louise Wiles 29:28

Okay, well, that that is really helpful. So some very helpful guidance there for people who are thinking about insurance. And I'd, just underline that it's really important to take the time to do the research to make sure you are properly covered. Having lived abroad a number of times and at times had company policies and others had to do it ourselves. And, you know, there have been times when we were very, very pleased that we had our private medical insurance. And we weren't living, you know, we were living in Europe, actually. So we could in theory have been treated in the countries that we're living in through the agreement with the UK, the European Union, but we still had private medical insurance. And that access certainly eased quite a number of situations for us, so definitely worth thinking about and investigating. So, if people would like to get in touch with you to talk about their insurance needs, can you direct them to your website or email? How can we get in touch with you?

David Tompkins 30:38

Yeah, we offer our individual expatriate plans via Expat Financial.com where they can submit a quote request, call or email us Skype, even, the requirements, get a quote and apply online for the International Health insurance plans that we offer from some very large and well respected global insurance providers. We are an independent insurance advisor, we are paid by the insurer that you choose. So, the clients get the same rates and coverage, premiums are payable direct to the to the insurance provider. But they also have us as an advocate both before, and after the purchase from the insurer. So, wherever get down the road if there is a claims issue potentially, then we can certainly advocate on their behalf. Expat Financial, which is a division of TFG Global Insurance Solutions Ltd, which is our corporate entity also works with a wide variety of expat employers around the world to examine their global insurance needs taking quotes to the market, advocate and assist global mobility managers in their duty of care responsibilities as it relates to global insurance. We have a lot of experience as well in assisting clients in very high risk regions around the globe, including sourcing special risk coverage, which as we mentioned earlier, things like kidnap and ransom terrorism coverage, etc. So yeah, definitely you can give us call as well to our corporate email is info@TFGGLOBAL.com

Louise Wiles 32:19

Brilliant, great, okay, well, I will put all those websites and links on the blog post that goes with this episode, which can be found at ThrivingAbroadcom to go there and look for this episode, and, get in touch if you have any insurance needs. Thank you very much for your time today.

David Tompkins 32:42

No, it's really been a pleasure talking to you today and hopefully we can be a service to some of your expats in the near future.

Louise Wiles 32:50

Brilliant. Thank you. Thank you very much.

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