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Open Enrollment 2021: How to Handle This Year's Unique Challenges

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XpertHR

AGENDA

- 1 — Increased Importance of Open Enrollment
- 2 — Changes to Benefits Offerings
- 3 — Virtual Enrollment
- 4 — Best Practices for Open Enrollment
- 5 — Beyond Open Enrollment
- 6 — How XpertHR Can Help



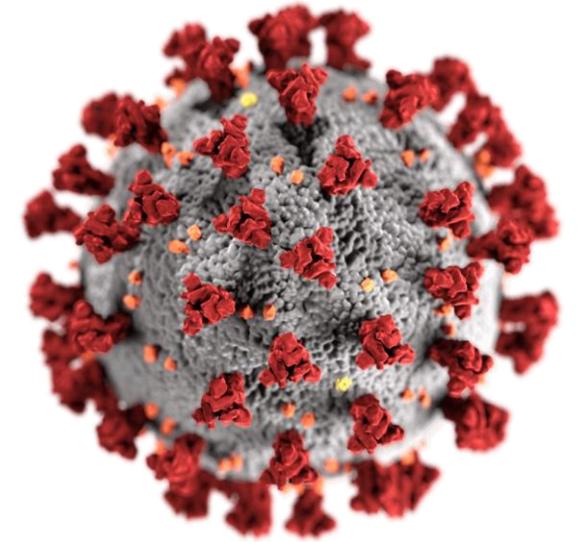
Overall Importance of Open Enrollment



- Benefits = a significant percentage of an employee's total compensation.
- You spend a lot of money on benefits for your workforce, and you want employees to use, appreciate and understand their benefits offerings.
- This means ensuring that your workforce:
 - Understands the significance of open enrollment; and
 - Is engaged in the process.

COVID-19's Effect on Employees

- Employees have been affected by COVID-19 in countless ways, including:
 - Radically changed norms at work and life in general
 - Uncertainty and apprehension about the future
 - Financial hardships (i.e., furloughs/layoffs in the family, saving less for retirement, tapping retirement accounts)
 - Family and friends may have been sick or exposed
 - Postponed doctor's visits, treatments, or elective procedures
 - Chaotic school situations
 - Isolation



Increased Importance of Benefits This Year Due to COVID-19

- **BIG TAKEAWAY**: Employees will be paying a lot more attention to benefits this year.
 - According to a Prudential survey, 75% of survey respondents agreed that:
 - *“Due to the pandemic, I feel that access to benefits through an employer is now more important than ever before.”*
- **What does this mean for open enrollment?**
 - Employees are thinking about their health and well being more than ever.
 - They are more interested in mental health, telehealth and COVID-19 coverage.
 - Expect a higher volume of questions from your employees about benefits.

Changes to Benefits Offerings

- Due to COVID-19, many employers may be considering adding, expanding, decreasing, or eliminating benefits.
- What you are considering is going to depend on your organization's financial realities.
- Examples of additions/expansions:
 - Mental health
 - Wellness/well being benefits
 - Telehealth
 - Financial wellness
 - Dependent care resources
- Examples of decreases/eliminations:
 - Shifting costs to employees
 - Elimination of employer 401(k) match



Evaluate Current Benefits Offerings

- Employee benefits should be designed to meet both employee and employer needs.
- Continually evaluate your benefits offerings to make sure they match your organization's evolving needs and strategies.
 - COVID-19 is a great example!
- Assess your current benefits offerings when you begin initial preparation for open enrollment.



Evaluate Current Benefits Offerings

When evaluating your current benefits strategy, consider:

- Reviewing benchmarking studies to determine a competitive level of benefits;
- Identifying benefits with the lowest employee participation rates;
- Redesigning or eliminating unpopular benefits;
- Taking a close look at employee demographics to determine which benefits are likely to be most attractive to your workforce; and
- Conducting a thorough vendor assessment to determine whether your benefits vendors are meeting your needs.

Virtual Enrollment: The New Normal?

- Virtual enrollment - the reality for many more organizations this year due to the pandemic.
- Virtual enrollment will be key to:
 - Addressing workforces that are still remote
 - Ensuring a safe and secure enrollment process
- To deal with the shift, employers must :
 - Be adaptable, agile, creative
 - Use available technology
 - Prepare for logistical challenges

Methods for Virtual Enrollment

- Use a variety of virtual methods:
 - Live and/or on-demand webinars
 - Educational videos
 - Virtual meetings via Zoom, Teams, etc.
 - Virtual benefit fairs
 - Email
 - Text messaging
 - Social media
 - QR codes
 - Benefits website/digital hubs for information
 - 1:1 chats between employees and HR/benefits providers
- **TIP:** Strive to make sure your assets are easily downloadable and accessible on mobile.



Advantages to Virtual Enrollment

- More autonomy and choice as to how and when employees consume open enrollment information. For example, assets can be:
 - Assessed and re-accessed
 - Available 24/7
 - Reviewed by family members who help with decision making
- Collecting paper documents from employees can be difficult and time-consuming.
- There may be the potential to:
 - Incorporate your branding and logos in open enrollment materials
 - Integrate virtual enrollment platforms with other systems (e.g., HR/payroll solutions).

Best Practices for Open Enrollment

Remember the Overall GOAL:

- Supporting your employees during these unprecedented pandemic times



Evaluate Communications Strategy

- Make open enrollment easier with a powerful and persuasive benefits communication strategy.
- Annually evaluate your strategy to make sure it is effective and review whether:
 - Your communication strategy is consistent;
 - There are measurable goals included in the strategy;
 - You should offer 24/7 access to a user-friendly benefits site;
 - Senior leadership buys in to the strategy; and
 - Employee demographics and communication preferences are being considered.

Evaluate Communications Strategy

- Evaluate what communication methods worked in the past and which ones did not.
- Realize that prior methods may not work or be ideal this year.
- Use a variety of different media.
- Get to know your audience -> your employees.
- Customize your strategy and keep employee needs in mind.
- Gear your communications toward your audience and think about the methods that would engage them.

Evaluate Communications Strategy

- Create a comprehensive communication plan for every part of open enrollment (i.e., before, during, and after).
- If offering new things, start putting information out early before open enrollment starts.
- Make sure your EEs know where to go to get more information (e.g., benefits website).
- Ask your benefits vendors for help with communications.

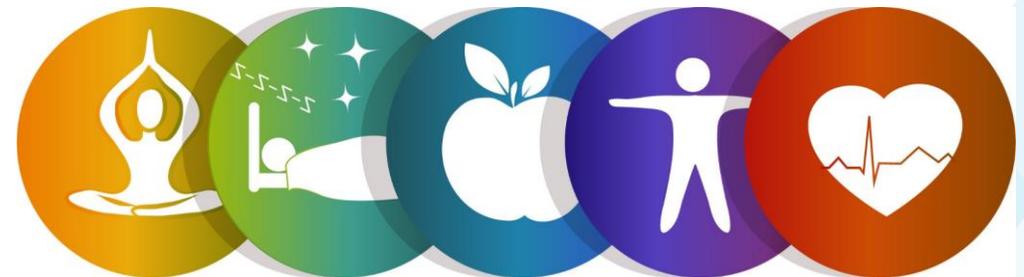


Remember COBRA Qualified Beneficiaries and Furloughed Workers

- You may have to communication changes to lots of different audiences (e.g., furloughed workers, laid off workers on COBRA).
- Qualified beneficiaries on COBRA must be offered the same benefits, the same benefit choices, and the same co-payments, deductibles and coverage limits as similarly-situated individuals.
- Qualified beneficiaries must have the opportunity to choose different benefits during open enrollment.

Highlight Nonhealth Benefits

- Highlight ALL the benefits you offer.
- This may be especially key this year because of the pandemic.
- Don't forget about things like:
 - Financial wellness benefits
 - Wellness programs
 - Mental health offerings and employee assistance programs (EAPs)
 - Student loan assistance
 - Disability insurance
 - Preventive care (e.g., flu shots, vaccines, cancer screenings, stress management, and nutrition resources)



Engage Employees and Help Them

- Make sure your workforce understands the significance of open enrollment and is engaged in the process.
- Consider the pros and cons of active enrollment.
- Keep your message simple and focus on the benefits.
- Use the different communication methods you decided on when developing your strategy.
- Make it personal for your employees:
 - Provide real life examples and testimonials
 - Incorporate decision making tools, financial situations, side-by-side charts.
- Include other decision makers in open enrollment (e.g., spouses, partners)
- Get your leaders involved!

Explain, Explain, Explain

- Reinforce the value of the benefits you provide to your workforce.
- If you add coverage during open enrollment, highlight such enhancements to employees.
- Communicate early and often about any changes to benefits that are happening at open enrollment.
- Let employees know:
 - The basis for the changes;
 - What alternatives were considered;
 - Why the employer chose a specific approach; and
 - How the changes benefit employees and help the organization meet its objectives.



Beyond Open Enrollment

- Benefits don't stop after open enrollment.
- Send out post-enrollment surveys.
- Keep up with benefits trends, legislation, and news.
- Start planning for next year!



Develop a Year-Round Communication Schedule

- Keep promoting your benefits and continue to educate your employees.
- Develop a plan to communicate benefits information all year.
- Open enrollment should only be one part of this strategy so when it approaches, you:
 - Don't have to present everything at once; and
 - Can focus on changes to benefits plans and helping employees through the process.
- Customize your communications based on the time of year and what is going on.

How XpertHR Can Help

- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Benefits](#)
- [Help Employees Use Employer-Provided Benefits During the Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Pandemic Checklist](#)
- [Remind Employees of Employer-Provided Benefits During the Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Pandemic Letter](#)
- [Employment Law Manual: Benefits Table of Content](#)
 - [Benefit Communications: Federal](#)
 - [Benefit Planning and Design: Federal](#)
 - [Other Benefits and Services: Federal](#)
- [Health Care Continuation Coverage \(Mini-COBRA\) Laws by State](#)
- [Employee Benefits 2020: XpertHR Survey Report](#)
- [Editor's Choice: Open Enrollment](#)

Any questions?