



## Use the Opportunity

### *Follow these tips for your next open enrollment*

Open enrollment is when employees can sign up for their company-sponsored health plan, and as the insurance industry has changed, open enrollment has, too.

“The importance of open enrollment and the enrollment process have changed significantly over the years,” says Carla Flamm, sales and retention executive at HealthLink, Inc. “With all the new laws, extensions and even the increased use of electronic filing tools, open enrollment can be quite complicated for the average employer.”

For some employers, this complication is too much to add to their ever-growing list of to-dos, so they opt for the bare minimum open enrollment process. However, by not taking advantage of the unique educational opportunities open enrollment can offer, employers may be missing a chance to help save money for the plan, and for their employees.

#### **1) Start early**

The most prepared employers start planning for open enrollment four to five months before it starts. Employers should start by working with their broker, third party administrator (TPA) and network partner to examine the current plan and its performance. From there, employers can consider changes to make next year’s plan more effective.

Employers should also start planning for the actual enrollment process. They need to make some big decisions early on, such as whether or not they will require each employee to go through the enrollment process so they can collect updated information, or if only employees with changes need to re-enroll.

#### **2) Collaborate with your partners**

Employers should work collaboratively with their broker, TPA and network partner to plan for open enrollment early. Together, they should evaluate claim history and spending trends to determine if benefit changes are necessary. They should also compare the current plan offering to similar companies to determine how competitive the benefits are. These partners should be an employer’s trusted go-to resource for ensuring the health plan offering and open enrollment process meets all industry standards and regulations.

#### **3) Educate employees**

After making initial benefit decisions, employers should be diligent about educating their employees of their options, any changes that may affect them and how to make good purchasing decisions. Employers should consider giving employees educational materials that focus on selecting a plan that is right for them by encouraging them to evaluate components such as deductibles and out-of-pocket maximums, instead of focusing solely on premiums.

#### **4) Be proactive with information**

Employers should send benefit and educational materials to employees no later than two to three weeks prior to open enrollment. Employees need time to be familiar with this information so that they’re prepared to ask questions and make their selections during the open enrollment period. Don’t wait for employees to ask for these pieces, get them out as soon as possible. Proactive education means

HR departments can spend more time enrolling employees in their plan and less time answering questions.

#### **5) Consider a health fair**

Hosting a health fair is the best way to optimize the open enrollment period and ensure success. Employees can get the information they need to make the best choice for them, and employers can take advantage of the face-to-face time to complete health and wellness screenings and enroll employees onsite — eliminating confusion and saving time. Employers who offer these fairs should be sure that every component of the health plan, including medical, dental, life and disability, etc., are present at the event so employees have a complete understanding. These events should be easy and convenient for employees to attend, with a potential incentive for attending.

#### **Do you have any tips for employees getting ready to start open enrollment?**

Employees should be fully prepared for open enrollment by doing their research, asking questions and taking advantage of the resources and learning opportunities their employer offers, such as health fairs or webinars. Employees should also come to enrollment meetings prepared with the correct information they may need, such as personal and dependent Social Security numbers. In the end, it is up to the employee to be their own advocate and select a plan that is best for them and their families.