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If you have any questions regarding your Welfare, Pension or Annuity benefits, please let us know!

How you can reach us:

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We look forward to hearing from you!

Benefit News and Tips



STRETCHING OUR WELFARE BUCKS

by getting the right care, at the right place, at the right time . . .

It's a problem when you earn less than you spend. You can tread water for a time by raiding your nest egg or going into debt, but eventually something has to change or you're headed for trouble. This is true when it comes to our personal finances, and it is equally true for the Welfare Fund.

Year after year, the difficulty the Welfare Fund faces is that our expenses increase much faster than our revenues. This has been true for most organizations that provide health insurance. It's the reason the government is trying to re-structure the whole system, and while we may argue about how they are going about it, nobody can reasonably argue that the path we were on was sustainable in the long run.

The reason the Fund has been able to make up these ongoing shortfalls is that the Trustees have made a series of adjustments to the benefit plan over the years. They've used several strategies, but when it comes down to it, there really aren't that many tools in the box. What would you do with your personal budget? You can (1) increase the money coming in, (2) cut back, or (3) figure out ways to stretch your dollars.

For the Fund, increasing the money coming in either involves negotiated increases in your employer's contribution and wage rates, or increases in your self-pay premium. Over the years those negotiated contribution rates have gotten pretty high, and it becomes increasingly more difficult to increase them ever higher. And when the Union and Employers do agree to a contribution increase, it's often a shift from wages to benefit contributions, so in a sense you are paying regardless of where the extra revenue comes from.

The second option, cutting back, usually amounts to making plan changes that increase copays, coinsurance, and deductibles. All three mean additional cost for you. The only difference is that instead of feeling it upfront as with your self-pay premiums, you are paying the extra cost at the point you are actually using the coverage.

You get the point, right? Whether we are talking about raising revenues or cutting cost, it's you, as a participant in our little health care cooperative, that ultimately bears the cost.

So that brings us to the third option . . . figuring out how to stretch the dollars that we have. The Fund does this on an ongoing basis, and we strive to be as efficient as possible and spend your dollars wisely. The announcement regarding the new Pharmacy Benefit card further in the newsletter is an excellent and recent example. In this case, the Trustees and our talented advisors were able to find a way to save almost a million dollars simply by separating the pharmacy

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STRETCHING OUR WELFARE BUCKS *(continued)*

benefit from your medical insurance, with NO reduction in your pharmacy benefit. That was a great move.

And there are other ways that we stretch the buck by becoming better consumers and shoppers of health services. The Trustee's are constantly looking at different strategies for reducing costs without reducing your benefits or increasing your cost. Many of the ideas being considered revolve around a concept of "Wellness" -- which is shorthand for an industry change in focus from treating the sick, to working to keep people healthy. We have a huge opportunity here because, unlike most employers where workers come and go over the years, you as a Local One member are for the most part in the Fund for life. (We just retired a couple of gentlemen who worked under Local One for over 50 years!) And when you have folks with you for decades, making sure that they get the right test, at the right place, at the right time, can make a enormous difference in the cost of their lifelong care, not to mention the difference in their quality of life. And when the Fund has you onboard for life, whether you decide to quit smoking and stay fit, can make a HUGE difference to the Fund's bottom line. And the best part is that, unlike the other options (all of which cost you *something*), this one is a win/win for both the Fund, and for each of us individually. Some of the ideas being discussed include:

Creating a financial incentive for participants to get an Annual Wellness Visit.

This has the benefit for making sure our participants get recommended screenings and care, and that when you get sick, you have an ongoing relationship with a doctor and don't end up in an emergency room. (Improper use of ER's is a huge area of waste.) Also we want to encourage folks to have access to a patient-centric, family-based practice that serves the whole person, and coordinates all aspects of a patient's care. To that end we are beginning to work with the Actor's Fund with the hope that we can create a dedicated Wellness Clinic that will serve our participants in Manhattan. And to make it convenient for many participants, we are also considering the possibility of creating a space in the Union Hall so that a visiting physician could offer Wellness exams right here on 46th street. The incentive would probably take the form of a credit against your self-pay premium payment, but details haven't been confirmed yet.

Reducing Waste and Excess Costs. It's estimated that 1/3 of the total US health care cost is attributable to unnecessary services, inefficiency, over charges, fraud and missed prevention opportunities. That's staggering, and a huge opportunity for savings. We need to catch chronic conditions early. We need to make sure that those of you with chronic conditions get the care you need, at the time you need it. We need to make sure that when you have complex medical situations involving multiple conditions, you are getting the comprehensive and coordinated care and support you require. We need to make sure that all our folks are getting the recommended screenings. And we need to make sure that when you need specialized care, you are referred to doctors with proven records that follow the recommended treatment guidelines, are efficient and effective providers, and to hospitals and practices that have earned reputations as Centers of Excellence. To that end we are considering bringing in an RN to work with us in the capacity of a Health Coordinator and Wellness Coach. This person would work directly with the Fund's participants to make sure they are getting the proper care . . . the right test or medication or procedure, at the right place, and at the right time. The Coach will also be able to help our folks navigate the health care system, which for most of us, at the time we are most in need, can be confusing and sometimes overwhelming.

These are some of the ideas being considered, all with a long view of where we need to get to in the long run. The Trustees will continue to work with the Fund's very talented team of advisors to ensure that we aggressively protect this very important benefit so that it is available to you and your family long into our shared future. And with your help and cooperation, we will surely succeed.

WATCH YOUR MAIL . . . CIGNA IS SENDING OUT NEW BENEFIT CARDS . . .

. . . and now there will be TWO Cards: One for Medical, and One for Pharmacy

You will receive mail from CIGNA later in December that contains new benefit cards that become effective January 1. Please note that instead of one card for both your medical and pharmacy benefits, you will be receiving a separate card for pharmacy coverage with a new account number. **It is important that when you visit a pharmacy for the first time after January 1, you bring your card as any information a pharmacy currently has on file will be invalid.**

While we know that this is a small inconvenience to you, it was made necessary by a change in the way pharmacy benefits are being delivered. The good news is that this change will save the Fund almost \$1 million dollars a year . . . without changing your coverage or changing the insurance carrier.

Please let the Fund Office know if you do not receive your new cards. You may also print temporary cards by logging in to MyCIGNA.com. If you have any questions or problems, please call Gloria Shea at the Fund Office (212-247-5225, x104).

Did you know?

Scientific evidence shows that physical activity can reduce your risk of dying early from many leading causes of death, including heart disease and some cancers. This is remarkable for two reasons:

1. Only a handful of lifestyle choices have as big an impact on your health as physical activity. In fact, active people who exercise for just under 7 hours a week have a **40% lower risk of dying early** than those who are active for less than 30 minutes a week.
2. You don't have to exercise vigorously to reduce your risk of premature death. You can lower your risk significantly by engaging in just 2 hours and 30 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity each week.

Don't wait. Now's the time to step up your exercise routine. Do it for yourself. Do it for your health. Do it for life.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/everyone/health/index.html

**PLEASE NOTE: Self-Pay
Premiums are Due
January 1.**

**Late Payers will be
Terminated January 31!**

If you don't get your self-pay premium in or postmarked before **January 1st**, you will be subject to the **\$25 late fee**. Much worse than that, if you miss the **January 31st** deadline, you will lose your coverage!

Please don't take any chances losing this very valuable benefit.

**Remember to make your
payment ON TIME!**

Still looking for that special gift for your loved ones?

1-866-NY-QUITS

New York State Smokers' Quitline

- The Quitline is a free service that provides New York State residents with help when they are ready to stop using tobacco.
- The Quitline is staffed by Quit Coaches who are specially trained to provide information and coaching on a variety of quitting tobacco use topics, such as stop smoking medications, withdrawal symptoms and developing a quit plan.
- Callers to the Quitline can leave a message and request a call back; or listen to motivational messages and daily tips.
- By phone or web, clients can request a variety of resources, including FREE nicotine replacement therapy (the nicotine patch) and fact sheets.
- Clients can join a growing on-line smokefree community, that includes blogs, a coaches forum, a savings calculator, and more.
- The Quitline also assists health professionals. Physicians and healthcare providers can use the Quitline service as a referral for their patients' stop smoking plans and to enhance recommended and/or prescribed stop smoking medications.
- Healthcare providers can also call the Quitline to obtain concise, up-to-date cessation information, order office materials that can be shared with their patients, or learn more about the referral program.
- The Quitline provides cessation services to a variety of other clients, including friends and family of tobacco users, health educators, businesses, parents, and students who are looking for information.
- All services of the Quitline are free and confidential. They are available in English and Spanish, with coaching offered in other languages. Services are also available for people who are deaf or hearing impaired.
- The Quitline is located at Roswell Park Cancer Institute and supported through the New York State Department of Health.



1-866-NY-QUITS (1-866-697-8487)

www.nysmokefree.com

Happy Holidays from the Fund Office!

Mariann, Gloria, Denise, Shirley, Tina, Colbert and Scott