

New Local Solution for National Health Insurance Problem

Health insurance premiums for employers rose 9.2 percent last year—nearly triple the rate of inflation, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation. Employers are feeling the pinch in Illinois and across America, bringing widespread attention to solutions with the potential to control costs.

More and more businesses are turning to consumer-directed health plans, which combine high deductible insurance with savings accounts that help individual employees fund initial medical expenses. A recent employer survey, conducted by Watson Wyatt Worldwide and the National Business Group on Health, found 29 percent now offer these kinds of plans, up from less than ten percent two years ago. In 2007, 33 percent more employers planned to implement a consumer-directed health plan.

These trends have new relevance for small businesses. In May 2006, The Employers' Coalition on Health (ECOH), a non-profit organization focused on improving health care costs and administrative services to member companies, employees and their families, entered into a partnership with Destiny Health, a consumer-directed health care provider, to offer The Destiny Health Plan to ECOH members. The partnership combines the strongest, most cost effective network in northern Illinois with the world's largest consumer-directed health care provider. This innovative health plan is the first and only insurance plan to have exclusive access to the ECOH network.

"The ECOH/Destiny Health partnership opens up the entire small employer market for the Coalition and at the same time, gives Destiny the buying power of Coalition. Small employers need more than a traditional plan to battle the rising cost of health care. Destiny Health's progressive plan and ECOH's exceptional regional health care networks makes this product the right solution for many employers," said Sam Schmitz, Executive Director, ECOH.

Holding down premiums

Consumer-directed health plans can help contain premiums by encouraging smart health care decisions. Employees build and spend their own medical savings accounts, with the protection of insurance beyond the deductible and the advantage of discounted rates negotiated by the plan from health care providers.

Founded in 1995 by ten Rockford-area employers, ECOH's mission was to control health care costs through direct contracts with providers, with emphasis on quality and delivery of care. It has since grown to include more than 120 northern Illinois companies, representing nearly 60,000 covered lives. It now has grown to include two distinct networks with providers in northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin: ECOH Network, with more than 1,500 primary and specialty care providers and 21 hospitals; and ECOH River Valley, with more than 1,200 primary and specialty care providers and 19 hospitals. Realizing that the needs of a larger company differs to that of a small business, especially on the matters of cost, ECOH partnered with Destiny Health to provide an optimal solution to their small business members.

"As a plan administrator and member, I was very happy to see prices within the network not available outside the plan," said Mike Broski, President of Broski Enterprise, a current ECOH and Destiny Health Plan member. "The Destiny Health Plan's integrated solution, which combines a medical savings account with health insurance and a robust wellness plan, also makes it convenient for administrators and members alike."

Building up wellness

Wellness programs that encourage employees to make healthy lifestyle changes are another popular solution to rising health care costs. The Hay Group, a Philadelphia consulting firm, found that 75 percent of employers it surveyed in 2006 offered a wellness program.

Earlier this year, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that few consumer-directed health plans offered a wellness-focused rewards program. The Destiny Health Plan offers The Destiny Health Vitality Program, an integrated rewards program proven to motivate healthy behavior change.

Through Vitality, members engage in activities that support fitness, education, lifestyle and prevention. They enjoy perks like reduced gym membership dues and rewards like brand name merchandise and vacation packages.

"The vision and values of Destiny Health and ECOH are very well aligned," said Art Carlos, CEO of Destiny Health. "We are both committed to providing value to members and employers through the equal attention we give to wellness, care quality, consumer choice, and member education.

Offering premium service and satisfaction

In addition to customizing its plan with ECOH, Destiny Health is extending its commitment to service and satisfaction:

- Efficient, friendly consultants answer calls within ten seconds and emails within two business hours on average.
- Claims have a 99 percent accuracy rate in processing; 90 percent of claims without follow-up requirements are paid within ten days.
- More than 90 percent of all plan members rate customer service good or better at answering questions and are satisfied with their health plan.

For more information about how to take advantage of The Destiny Health Plan offered by ECOH, contact your health insurance broker or ECOH, at 815-397-0790. Call us for information on an upcoming seminar to learn more about this exciting new offering.