



Affordable Employer Health Insurance Options: eHealthInsurance Releases Open Enrollment Tips for Small Businesses

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MOUNTAIN VIEW, CA, Oct 26, 2011 (MARKETWIRE via COMTEX) --

Today eHealthInsurance (NASDAQ: EHTH), the leading online source of health insurance for individuals, families and small businesses, published tips to help small business owners navigate cost and coverage concerns for open enrollment season.

Open enrollment is the time when businesses ask employees to make health insurance choices and other benefit selections for the coming year. Open enrollment can occur at different times for different businesses, but many small businesses will offer open enrollment for the 2012 benefit year between October and December 2011.

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation(1), the average cost of employer-provided health insurance increased 9% for families and 8% for individuals in 2011. Another study from the National Business Group on Health(2) projects an additional increase of over 7% for 2012. As a result, many small business owners may struggle to find affordable health insurance plans that still provide employees and their dependents with the benefits and access to medical care they've come to expect.

eHealthInsurance prepared the following tips especially for small business owners who may be facing increased health insurance costs but not have access to the support and resources available to larger companies:

Top Seven Open Enrollment Tips for Small Businesses

Educate your employees about health insurance costs: Health insurance costs are on the rise for many businesses, but the fact is that most employees don't have a good understanding of how much employers pay toward their health insurance coverage. If you need to ask your employees to contribute more toward their premiums, it's time to sit down and have a frank discussion. When employees better understand the challenges increased costs present to your business, they may be more willing to accept necessary adjustments to their coverage or contributions.

Employees prefer cuts in benefits to rate hikes: A recent survey sponsored by eHealthInsurance and conducted by Kelton Research shows that employees are more likely to be upset by increases in their monthly premiums than by changes to their benefits. Keep that in mind when deciding how to adjust your health insurance offerings for next year.

Conduct an employee poll to find out which benefits matter most: If you find that you must cut benefits from your health plan in order to make ends meet, ask your employees to complete an anonymous poll. Don't ask about their health or their medical history -- that's illegal -- but ask them which types of benefits matter most to them: robust preventive care, prescription drugs, chiropractic, maternity care, low copayments, vision or dental coverage, etc. This can give you some guidance when choosing which kinds of plans to offer.

Consider ALL options available from your carrier, and new carriers too: When open enrollment season comes around, many employers get notices from their insurance company suggesting a few coverage alternatives, but there's usually more to choose from. Contact your agent or broker to explore other options that might be available through your current carrier. A licensed agent representing multiple carriers can also provide you with fresh quotes from other insurers in your area. It's all part of doing your homework if you want to make sure and get the most for your health insurance dollars.

Offer your employees more than one coverage option: Smaller businesses tend to offer fewer coverage alternatives, but there may be benefits to offering more. If you're currently offering your workers only one health plan, consider adding a second or third to the mix. For example, you might offer a high-deductible Health Savings Account-eligible plan, and then another plan from the same carrier with a lower deductible. The dollar amount you contribute toward employee coverage need not change, but it gives employees who want it the chance to start a Health Savings Account or to pay a little more from their own pockets for a plan with a lower deductible or more robust benefits.

Get that new tax credit while it lasts: Not all small businesses can afford to offer health insurance. But until 2014 tax credits are available for small businesses with 25 or fewer employees with average annual wages of less than \$50,000. You may qualify for a credit of up to 35 percent of the premiums you pay toward employee coverage. Talk to your accountant to learn more.

Discourage employees from going uninsured: Some businesses will find that they're unable to provide employer-sponsored health insurance in the coming year, or that their employees can no longer afford rising rates and opt not to enroll. If that's the case, encourage your employees to do what they can to make sure they have some form of coverage. It gets them better access to medical care when they need it and helps keep them financially sound, which can only be good for your business. If their spouse works, they may be able to enroll in his or her plan. If they're under age 26, they may qualify to re-enroll in a parent's health insurance plan. To explore government-sponsored options, they can also contact the non-profit Foundation for Health Coverage Education at coverageforall.org.

Additional Resources:

- Help your workers make the right coverage decisions -- print and share copies of eHealthInsurance's open enrollment tips for employees
- Download a printable version of eHealthInsurance's open enrollment checklist to share with your employees
- Look for more open enrollment tips and information at the eHealthInsurance consumer blog, [Get Smart - Get Covered](#)

About eHealth eHealth, Inc. (NASDAQ: EHTH) is the parent company of eHealthInsurance, the nation's leading online source of health insurance for individuals, families and small businesses. Through the company's website, www.eHealthInsurance.com, consumers can get quotes from leading health insurance carriers, compare plans side by side, and apply for and purchase health insurance. eHealthInsurance offers thousands of individual, family and small business health plans underwritten by more than 180 of the nation's leading health insurance companies. eHealthInsurance is licensed to sell health insurance in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, making it the ideal model of a successful, high-functioning health insurance exchange. Through the company's eHealthTechnology solution (www.eHealthTechnology.com), eHealth is also a leading provider of health insurance exchange technology. eHealthTechnology's exchange platform provides a suite of hosted e-commerce solutions that enable health plan providers, resellers and government entities to market and distribute products online. eHealth, Inc. also provides powerful online and pharmacy-based tools to help seniors navigate Medicare health insurance options, choose the right plan and enroll in select plans online through its wholly-owned subsidiary, PlanPrescriber.com (www.planprescriber.com) and through its Medicare website www.eHealthMedicare.com.

For more health insurance news and information, visit the eHealthInsurance consumer blog: [Get Smart - Get Covered](#).

Notes: (1) Kaiser Family Foundation's 2011 Employer Health Benefits Survey (2) The National Business Group on Health: <http://www.businessgrouphealth.org/pressrelease.cfm?ID=179>

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