

# The first step of enrollment readiness: Setting the stage to create an optimal benefits strategy



Open enrollment season can be one of the busiest times of the year. But busy doesn't have to mean stressful. When it comes to getting — and keeping — clients grounded in the process, you know that it all starts with the benefits plan.

The benefits plan is at the core of every open enrollment season — without it, there is no enrollment. And while your clients may be eager to repeat what they did last year, you see each year as an opportunity to make their benefits program much better, for their business and their employees.

## Here are some go-to strategies to keep clients engaged in annual benefits and enrollment planning

### 1. Show them what's happening in the market.

Changes in health care happen every year, not just for your clients' companies, but nationwide. Similarly, employee surveys show different trends in light of generational shifts in the workforce — older generations growing out as younger generations enter and cement themselves — and what is deemed a normal benefits package may be subpar just a few years later. And that's without even mentioning the increased competition for employees and changes to workforces, work hours and work locations.

Throughout the United States, for example, small- and medium-sized businesses with fewer than 25 employees tend to offer about two benefit plans per employee, while businesses with more than 100 employees offer closer to four. And in the West, these average plan offerings are doubled.<sup>1</sup> If your client offers a plan with fewer benefits than the market average, the employees may notice and make their career decisions accordingly.

Studying the market is essential, but your clients might not make time for it. Instead, they likely rely on your expertise to provide them guidance in emerging trends.

### 2. Get granular about their workforce.

Market data and trends are important, but another wealth of knowledge can be gleaned by analyzing a client's benefits plan data from recent years. This data can include employee demographics, total plan enrollments, claims submitted, deductibles met, emergency room visits and more. Likewise, they can gather employee feedback from focus groups, polls or surveys.



These surveys can reveal misalignments between where your clients and their employees are at. Because while 72% of employers think employees understand health care costs, only 59% of employees say they do. More important, 81% of employers believe their employees can financially meet their health care expenses, but only 46% of employees could pay more than \$1,000 in out-of-pocket medical costs.<sup>2</sup> By reviewing their own employee data, you can help your clients see how well their thoughts align with their employees.

With five generations currently in the workforce, it's also important to note the different age brackets of your client's employees, as each generation has different needs and approaches to work, benefits, and enrollment communications and strategies.

For example, compared to other generations, millennials are most likely to want to work with a benefits advisor when making their benefit selections.<sup>2</sup> Taking all of this information into account will help you and your clients design employee benefits plans that are customized to each client's workforce.

### **3. Have them take the lead in prioritizing their benefits goals.**

Odds are your clients have ideas about the benefits-related goals they want to achieve, but they depend on you to help define and prioritize them. Your ongoing conversations about the market, their workforce and goal-setting will help unveil areas where clients want to focus on improvements so you can then dive into how to get there.

### **4. Help them evaluate — or reevaluate — their tech needs and how that will impact the benefits they choose.**

Tech can be intimidating. Clients may heavily rely on you to understand which tech products and practices best serve the benefits goals they've set and seamlessly integrate with the carriers you recommend. The enrollment technology your clients use can influence decisions regarding the carriers and plans that end up in the final benefits package — making tech central to your clients' decisions, not simply a vehicle for capturing employee selections. Working with your clients to compare tech options and the processes involved with each will help save time, money and other resources in the long run.

### **5. Show them how the inputs translate into the output.**

The strategies above can make it easier to help keep your clients actively engaged in identifying their goals and the must-have considerations for the benefits program you create. When you come back to them with benefit and carrier recommendations, they can trust you've curated the optimal mix that will help actualize their goals.

<sup>1</sup> Ease. "2020 SMB Benefits & Employee Insights Report." Published 2020. [Accessed 6.03.2022](#).

<sup>2</sup> Aflac. "2021-2022 Aflac WorkForces Report: Workplace Benefits Trends Executive Summary." Published September 2020. [Accessed 6.03.2022](#).

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