Benefits BUZZ

Benefits tips brought to you by
AxisPointe Benefit Advisors

March 2018

DID YOU KNOW?

At his swearing-in ceremony, new Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, Alex Azar, stated that bringing the price of prescription drugs down and tackling the opioid crisis are two topics he will focus on.

While there are no specifics on how he and President Donald Trump plan to do this, we will continue to monitor the issue and provide updates as possible.

Spending Resolution Affects ACA Taxes

On Jan. 22, 2018, President Donald Trump signed a short-term continuing spending resolution into law to end the government shutdown and continue funding through Feb. 8, 2018. The continuing resolution impacts the following three taxes and fees under the Affordable Care Act (ACA):

- Cadillac tax
- Health insurance providers fee
- Medical device excise tax

Cadillac Tax
The ACA imposes a 40 percent excise tax on high-cost group health coverage, also known as the "Cadillac tax." The resolution delays implementation of the Cadillac tax for two years, until 2022. There is some indication that the two-year delay will lead to an eventual repeal of the tax altogether.

Health Insurance Providers Fee
Beginning in 2014, the ACA imposed an annual, nondeductible fee on the health insurance sector, allocated across the industry according to market share. The resolution provides an additional one-year moratorium on the health insurance providers fee for the 2019 calendar year. However, it specifically declines to extend the moratorium through 2018. Therefore, the fee continues to apply for the 2018 calendar year.

Medical Device Excise Tax
The ACA also imposes a 2.3 percent excise tax on the sales price of certain medical devices, effective beginning in 2013. The continuing resolution extended a moratorium on collection of this tax for an additional two years, through the 2019 calendar year. As a result, the medical devices tax will not apply to any sales made between Jan. 1, 2016, and Dec. 31, 2019.

Next Steps
Employers should be aware of the evolving applicability of existing ACA taxes and fees so they know how the ACA affects their bottom lines. AxisPointe Benefit Advisors will continue to keep you informed of changes.

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New Rules for Disability Claims Take Effect Soon

On Jan. 5, 2018, the Department of Labor (DOL) announced that, effective **April 1, 2018**, employee benefit plans must comply with new requirements for disability benefit claims.

In 2016, the DOL released a final rule to strengthen the claims and appeals requirements for plans that provide disability benefits and are subject to the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA). On Nov. 24, 2017, the DOL delayed the final rule for 90 days—until April 1, 2018—to give stakeholders the opportunity to submit comments on the final rule's benefits and costs.

ERISA plans that include disability benefits must comply with the new procedural protections, effective for claims that are submitted after April 1, 2018. Entities that administer disability benefit claims, including issuers and third-party administrators, will need to revise their claims procedures to comply with the final rule.

HR Brief

Human Resources tips brought to you by
AxisPointe Benefit Advisors

March 2018

DID YOU KNOW?

Ninety-two percent of U.S. employers say that the severe skills shortage experienced by industries is negatively affecting employee productivity, engagement and retention, according to the Hays U.S. 2018 Salary Guide.

Respondents revealed that a lack of training and development and fewer workers entering their industries were the main causes of the shortage. Contact us for training and onboarding resources to make sure your business gets on the right track.

New HHS Secretary is Focused on Opioid Crisis, You Should Be Too

A recent study by the National Business Group on Health (NBGH) revealed that 80 percent of large employers are concerned about employees' abuse of prescription opioids.

The government is concerned, too. With about 91 Americans dying from a prescription opioid overdose every day, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) declared a public health emergency in October 2017. Tackling the opioid crisis is a top concern for the new HHS Secretary Alex Azar.

Employers across the country are working to curb the misuse of prescription opioids. With more employees falling victim to addiction, employers are seeing lower productivity, higher health care costs and fewer qualified applicants.

Employers need to do everything possible to combat the impact opioids have in the workplace. Exploring new initiatives can help you develop your own strategy to best suit the needs of your employees. The NBGH's survey revealed that the following five initiatives are the most common among employers across the country:

1. Provide opioid abuse training in the workplace to increase awareness.
2. Work with health plans to encourage physicians to consider alternative treatment for pain.
3. Expand coverage for pain management alternatives.
4. Limit coverage of opioids to a network of pharmacies or providers.
5. Limit the number of opioids on initial prescriptions.

For more information on what you can do about opioid abuse, contact us today.

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4 Things You Can Do to Manage Worst Flu in Decades

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the 2017-18 flu is the worst since the 2009 swine flu pandemic, and it's not expected to go away anytime soon.

To keep your workforce as healthy as possible, consider the following four suggestions:

1. Encourage employees to get the flu vaccine if they haven't already done so.
2. Allow sick employees to work from home.
3. Post information about the flu around the workplace.
4. Remind employees that frequent hand-washing is key in flu prevention.

Contact us for flu prevention materials or for more information on the seasonal flu.