



For Immediate Release

New Great-West Healthcare resource helps employees compare plans and budget for health care

GREENWOOD VILLAGE, Colo. – Nov. 8, 2006 – Employees soon will attend open enrollment meetings to choose a health plan for the coming year. With an abundance of health plan forms, booklets and brochures, the process can be daunting. To help employees in the enrollment process, Great-West Healthcare, a national employee benefits provider, added a new resource to its suite of decision support tools available on MyGreatWest.com.

The new Plan Cost Comparison tool helps users evaluate costs for up to three plan options based on information supplied by the user. It estimates annual health care expenses for an individual (or family) based on his/her health and other information entered by the user. Estimated results are calculated by the parameters of the plan entered by the user so individuals have an estimate of expected out-of-pocket costs for each option. The tool also factors in potential tax savings from user-entered information about pre-tax payment of premiums and contributions to a health savings account (HSA) or flexible spending account (FSA).

“At many companies, workers are being asked to assume greater responsibility for health care costs, so more than ever they need a resource to help them understand the tradeoffs associated with choosing a plan that might offer lower premiums but will cost more out of pocket when they receive care,” said Julie McCarter, vice president of product management, Great-West Healthcare. “This tool is a valuable resource to help members make decisions for themselves and their families.”

Requiring about 10 minutes to complete, the easy-to-use tool starts by asking a brief set of questions regarding general health, medical conditions and prescriptions of the individual (and any dependents). Based on the user's answers, the tool creates a health profile summarizing employee's (and dependent's) expected health care needs for the year. Each profile estimates the expected number of visits to the physician and emergency room, outpatient, inpatient and diagnostic services, and prescriptions for each individual. The profiles are developed using average utilization data and the information entered by the user. Health status, geographic area, age and gender are factored into the equation. Users can adjust the profile as needed if, for example, they plan to have an elective surgery or procedure in the coming year.

Once the profile is complete, users enter information (e.g., copays, coinsurance, premiums and deductibles) for the plans they wish to compare. Based on plan design information, the tool completes a series of behind-the-scenes calculations, applies average cost data from industry sources to the estimated medical services, and then computes the individual's estimated out-of-pocket obligation for each health plan option, as well as potential tax savings from pre-tax annual premiums and FSA/HSA contributions.

Both current and prospective members can access the plan cost comparison tool through MyGreatWest.com. Using the data from the tool, they can compare multiple plans from one employer or compare a single employer plan with a spouse's employer plan. While the tool provides a great deal of helpful information, the costs shown are only an estimate of the expected out-of-pocket costs for the plan year based on the information provided by the user. The actual costs may differ.

“As enrollment choices become more complex, a tool such as this is important to help employees evaluate their plan options, especially as consumers are facing more financial responsibility,” noted McCarter. “Additionally, employers benefit by having a resource they can provide employees to aid in enrollment decisions.”

Users should always consult the plan documents provided by their employer for the most complete information about their plan choices and consult their tax and legal advisors for information specific to their individual health plan needs and tax goals.

About Great-West Healthcare

Great-West Healthcare, a division of Great-West Life & Annuity Insurance Company, is a national employee benefits provider with expertise in self-funding and health care management solutions. Nationally, the division operates a health care network that includes more than 4,250 hospitals and 550,000 providers and provides health care services to 2 million people. Visit www.greatwesthealthcare.com for more information.

Great-West Life & Annuity Insurance Company, headquartered in metro-Denver, serves its customers through a full range of health care plans, life and disability insurance, annuities, and retirement savings products and services. It is an indirect, wholly owned subsidiary of Great-West Lifeco Inc. and a member of the Power Financial Corporation group of companies. Great-West Life & Annuity Insurance Company is not licensed to do business in New York. Products are sold in New York by its subsidiary First Great-West Life & Annuity Insurance Company, White Plains, N.Y.

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