

Medical Expenditure Panel Survey  
Insurance Component

## HEALTH INSURANCE COST STUDY DEFINITIONS

**ACTIVE EMPLOYEE** – A person who was employed full- or part-time in 2006 regardless of whether the employee was considered permanent, temporary, or seasonal. Include owners and officers of the organization. Exclude individuals who were contract laborers, retirees, laid off, left employment prior to 2006, or who were hired after 2006.

**CAFETERIA PLAN** – See *Flexible Benefits Plan*.

**COBRA** – Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1985 (COBRA). Part of this law requires employers to continue offering health coverage for enrollees and their dependents for a period of time after an enrollee leaves the firm. Typically, the enrollee pays the entire monthly premium when covered by COBRA. COBRA coverage for State and local governments was transmitted through the Public Health Service Act and may also be referred to as **PHSA** coverage or **PHSA (COBRA)** coverage.

**COINSURANCE** – A fixed percentage that an enrollee pays for medical expenses after the deductible amount, if any, was paid. Coinsurance rates may differ for different types of services. For example, an enrollee may pay a 10% rate for doctor fees, a 20% rate for hospital fees, and a 5% rate for prescription fees.

**CONVENTIONAL INDEMNITY/TRADITIONAL HEALTH PLAN** – A type of medical plan that allows the participant to choose any provider without effect on reimbursement. These plans reimburse the patient and/or provider as expenses are incurred.

**COPAYMENT** – A fixed dollar amount that an enrollee pays when medical service is received, regardless of the total charge for service. The insurer is responsible for the rest of the total charge. For example, an enrollee may pay a \$10 copay for each doctor's office visit, \$75 for each day in the hospital, and \$5 for each prescription.

**DEDUCTIBLE** – A fixed dollar amount during the benefit period (usually a year) that an insured person pays before the insurer starts to make payments for covered medical services. For example, if the plan has a \$100 deductible, the insured person would be responsible for the first \$100 of covered medical services. Plans may have both per individual and family deductibles. Plans may have separate deductibles for specific services. Deductibles are often associated with conventional indemnity plans.

**EMPLOYEE-PLUS-ONE COVERAGE** – Health insurance coverage for an employee-plus-spouse or an employee-plus-child(ren) AT A LOWER PREMIUM LEVEL than family coverage.

**EMPLOYEE PRE-TAX CONTRIBUTIONS TO HEALTH INSURANCE** – Also known as a Premium Only Plan (POP), this is the most basic type of Section 125 Plan. An employee can pay his/her share of the premium for employer-sponsored health insurance through a payroll deduction, prior to taxes being withheld. This lowers the amount of income on which the employee must pay taxes.

**EXCLUSIVE PROVIDER ORGANIZATION (EPO) PLAN** – A restrictive type of preferred provider organization plan under which employees must use providers from the specified network of physicians and hospitals to receive coverage. There is no coverage for care received from a non-network provider except in an emergency situation.

**FAMILY COVERAGE** – A health plan that covers the enrollee and members of his/her immediate family (spouse and/or children). For purposes of this survey, "family coverage" is any coverage other than single and employee-plus-one (see definitions). Some plans offer more than one rate for family coverage, depending on family size and composition. If more than one rate is offered, report costs for a family of four.

**FLEXIBLE BENEFITS PLAN (Full Cafeteria Plan)** – A benefit program under Section 125 of the Internal Revenue Code that offers employees a choice between permissible taxable benefits which may include cash, and nontaxable benefits such as life and health insurance, vacations, retirement plans, and child care. Although a common core of benefits may be required, the employee can determine how his or her remaining benefit dollars are to be allocated for each type of benefit from the total amount promised by the employer. Sometimes employee contributions may be made for additional coverage.

**FLEXIBLE SPENDING ACCOUNT (FSA)** – An account offered and administered by employers that provides a way for employees to set aside, out of their paycheck, pretax dollars to pay for the employee's share of insurance premiums or medical expenses not covered by the employer's health plan. The employer may also make contributions to a FSA. Typically, benefits or cash must be used within the given benefit year or the employee loses the money.

**FORMULARY** – A formulary is a list of prescription drugs that are preferred by the health plan for use. A formulary may include brand-name and generic drugs.

**GATEKEEPER** – A gatekeeper is responsible for coordinating (managing) all services, approving referrals and directing patients to specialists or health care facilities. Gatekeepers are associated with prepaid health plans. A gatekeeper may or may not be a physician.

**HEALTH INSURANCE PORTABILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACT (HIPAA)** – This federal law, enacted in 1996, protects health insurance coverage for workers and their families when they change jobs by limiting exclusions for pre-existing conditions, prohibiting discrimination against employees and dependents based on their health status, and guaranteeing renewability and availability of health coverage to certain employers and individuals.

**HEALTH MAINTENANCE ORGANIZATION (HMO)** – A health care system in which plan participants obtain comprehensive health care services from a specified list of "in-network" providers who receive a fixed periodic prepayment from the insurer. Plan participants' access to "in-network" providers is controlled by a primary-care physician or gatekeeper. HMOs typically do not have a deductible.

**HEALTH REIMBURSEMENT ARRANGEMENT (HRA)** – An arrangement where the employer agrees to reimburse health expenses up to a set amount per year for an employee. While often associated with a high deductible health plan, this is not a requirement. Only the employer can fund an HRA. Unused funds can be carried over to the following year.

**HEALTH SAVINGS ACCOUNT (HSA)** – A trust account owned by the employee for the purpose of paying for medical expenses not covered by the employer's health plan. The employee must be enrolled in a high deductible health plan that is HSA eligible in order to qualify for an HSA. Both employers and employees can contribute to an HSA. Unused funds are carried over to the following year.

**INSURANCE CARRIER** – A corporation that engages in the business of selling insurance protection to the public, either directly or through employers, unions, etc.

**LONG-TERM CARE INSURANCE** – Covers all forms of health care (both institutional and non-institutional) required by the chronically ill or disabled. Often provided as optional coverage.

**OPTIONAL COVERAGE (Single service plans)** – Separate coverage for a limited area of medical care to supplement the basic health insurance plan. These plans are often offered through an insurance company/carrier separate from the one providing basic health coverage. An additional premium is paid by the enrollee and/or employer for this optional coverage. (Example: Dental or Vision Plan)

**POINT-OF-SERVICE PLAN (POS) (Also called open-ended HMO or HMO/PPO hybrid)** – Plan participants' access to "in-network" providers is controlled by a primary-care doctor or gatekeeper. Participants are covered when they seek care from out-of-network providers, but at reduced coverage levels.

**PRE-EXISTING CONDITION LIMITATION** – Restricts coverage for medical or health conditions which exist prior to enrollment in a health plan. Pre-existing conditions may be excluded from coverage, or enrollees may have to wait a specified length of time before medical care related to the pre-existing condition is covered by the health plan.

**PREFERRED ("IN-NETWORK"/PARTICIPATING) PROVIDER** – A medical provider (doctor, hospital, pharmacy) who is a member of a health plan's network. Enrollees generally pay lower or no copayment for services from a preferred provider.

**PREFERRED PROVIDER ORGANIZATION (PPO) PLAN** – An indemnity plan where coverage is provided to participants through a network of selected health care providers (such as hospitals and physicians). The enrollees may go outside the network, but would incur larger costs in the form of higher deductibles, higher coinsurance rates, or non-discounted charges from the providers.

**PREMIUM** – Agreed upon fees paid for coverage of medical benefits for a defined benefit period. Premiums can be paid by employers, unions, employees, or shared by both the insured person and the plan sponsor.

**PREMIUM EQUIVALENT** – For self-insured plans, this is the cost per covered enrollee, or the amount the organization would expect to pay in premiums if the plan were insured by someone else. The premium equivalent is equal to the per-capita amount of claims, administration, and stop-loss premiums for a self-insured plan.

**PURCHASED PLAN (Also called a fully-insured plan)** – A health plan is considered purchased when the financial risk for the enrollee's medical claims is assumed by the health insurance company/carrier.

**SELF-INSURED PLAN** – A health plan is self insured when the financial risk for the enrollee's medical claims is assumed partially or entirely by the organization offering the plan. Organizations with self-insured plans commonly purchase stop-loss coverage from an insurer who agrees to bear the risk (or stop the loss) for those expenses exceeding a predetermined dollar amount.

**SINGLE COVERAGE** – A health plan that covers the employee only.

**STATE CONTINUATION-OF-BENEFITS LAWS** – Laws which vary by state mandating that organizations provide enrollees with the option of continuing to purchase insurance through the organization for a limited amount of time after they leave the organization's employ.

**STOP-LOSS COVERAGE** – A form of reinsurance for organizations with self-insured health plans which limits the amount the firm will have to pay for each enrollee's health care or for the total health expenses of the firm.

**THIRD PARTY ADMINISTRATOR (TPA)** – An individual or firm hired by an employer to handle claims processing, pay providers, and manage other functions related to the operation of health insurance. The TPA is not the policyholder or the insurer.

**TYPICAL PAY PERIOD** – Any pay period during calendar year 2006 in which employment was neither unusually high nor unusually low.

**UNDERWRITER** – The company that issues an insurance policy and assumes the financial risk for covered individuals.

**VOUCHER (STIPEND)** – A specific dollar amount that an organization provides to an employee to be applied toward the employee's health insurance coverage. The employee is then responsible for obtaining his or her own health insurance policy.

**If you would like more information on the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey – Insurance Component (MEPS-IC) or the survey sponsor, the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), please visit the AHRQ Website at <http://www.meps.ahrq.gov>**