



Benefits Administration Letter

Number: 17-404

Date: October 17, 2017

Subject: 2017 Federal Benefits Open Season: FSAFEDS, FEDVIP and FEHB Program Significant Plan Changes

This Benefits Administration Letter (BAL) is the fourth in our series of 2017 Federal Benefits Open Season BALs for the Federal Flexible Spending Account Program (FSAFEDS), the Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP) and the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program. This BAL provides information on significant plan changes for the FEHB Program for 2018. There are no significant changes for 2018 for FSAFEDS or FEDVIP.

This year's Federal Benefits Open Season will run from Monday, November 13 through Monday, December 11, 2017.

FEHB PROGRAM

The remainder of this letter provides important information on the significant changes affecting certain plans in the FEHB Program for the upcoming Open Season. The **first attachment** to this BAL identifies the FEHB plans and their corresponding significant changes. Some of these events will require action on the part of agencies and enrollees.

Please note there are plans leaving the FEHB Program at the end of 2017 or reducing their service areas and terminating their enrollment codes. Since employees in these terminating plans and service area reductions **must** enroll in a new plan during Open Season or they will be enrolled in the Standard Option of the GEHA Benefit Plan (the lowest-cost nationwide plan option for 2018 as determined by OPM) please distribute this list throughout your agencies. It is your responsibility to monitor employees who are covered by these terminating plans or service area reductions and follow up with those who have not submitted an enrollment change before the end of Open Season. Again, enrollees in the terminating plans and enrollment codes who do not change their health plan by enrolling in another FEHB plan during Open Season will be enrolled in the Standard Option of the GEHA Benefit Plan (the lowest-cost nationwide plan option for 2018 as determined by OPM).

TIP: Distribute the attached list of significant FEHB plan changes to all employees so they can check to see if their plan or service area will continue to participate in the FEHB Program in 2018.

Table 1: Plans Leaving the FEHB Program AND

Table 2: FEHB Plan Reducing Service Areas and Terminating Enrollment Codes

What Must Employees Do?

- Employees in terminating plans (**Table 1**) or service area reductions with terminating enrollment codes (**Table 2**) **must** enroll in a new health plan during Open Season. If they do not enroll in a new plan, they will be enrolled in the Standard Option of the GEHA Benefit Plan (the lowest-cost nationwide plan option for 2018 as determined by OPM).
- **New Coverage:** Coverage under an enrollee's new health plan will be effective the first day of the pay period beginning on or after January 1, 2018; **for most employees this will be Sunday, January 7, 2018.** Enrollees will remain covered and receive the 2017 benefits of the old plan until coverage under the new plan becomes effective.

What Must You Do?

- You must notify employees enrolled in the plans listed in **Tables 1 and 2** to select new plans. Advise your employees if they do not choose new plans, they will be enrolled in the Standard Option of the GEHA Benefit Plan (the lowest-cost nationwide plan option for 2018 as determined by OPM).
- Distribute copies of this list to employees with your agency's notice about Open Season along with copies of the **second attachment**, *FastFacts: What to do When Your Health Plan is Terminating Coverage in Your Area or Leaving the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program*.
- Follow up with employees in these plans and remind them to select new plans.
- **Belated changes:** Some employees still might not receive instructions to change plans during Open Season. We encourage you to be liberal in accepting belated Open Season changes from employees enrolled in terminating plans or plans with service area reductions and terminating enrollment codes.

What Will Health Plans Do?

Plan Notification: The plans in **Tables 1 and 2** have been instructed to notify enrollees of the need to select new plans for 2018; however, because some plans' enrollment and address lists may not be up-to-date, we encourage you to accept belated changes.

Table 3: FEHB Plans Reducing Service Areas without Terminating Enrollment Codes

What Must Employees Do?

Employees in the service areas being terminated should elect a new health plan for 2018; however, employees who do not choose a new health plan will only have emergency services where they live and will have to travel to their plan's remaining service area to receive full benefits.

What Must You Do?

- You must notify employees enrolled in the plans listed in **Table 3** to select a new plan. Advise your employees if they do not choose a new plan, they will only have emergency services where they live and they will have to travel to their plan's remaining service area to receive full benefits in 2018.
- Distribute copies of this list to employees with your agency's notice about Open Season along with copies of the **second attachment**, *FastFacts: What to do When Your Health Plan is Terminating Coverage in Your Area or Leaving the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program*.
- Follow up with employees in these plans and remind them to select a new plan.
- **Belated changes:** Some employees still might not receive instructions to change plans during Open Season. We encourage you to be liberal in accepting belated Open Season changes from employees enrolled in the plan reducing its service area.

What Will Health Plans Do?

Plan Notification: The plans in **Table 3** have been instructed to notify enrollees that their respective service areas are being terminated. If enrollees do not choose another health plan, the enrollees will only have emergency services where they live and they will have to travel to their plan's remaining service area to receive full benefits in 2018. However, because a plan's enrollment and address lists may not be up-to-date, we encourage you to accept belated changes.

Table 4: FEHB Plan Terminating Option and Enrollment Codes

What Must Employees Do?

- Employees in the plan dropping an option (**Table 4**) may choose a new health plan during Open Season or remain with their current plan and be switched automatically into the plan's option specified in **Table 4**.
- **New Coverage:** Coverage under an enrollee's new health plan or option will be effective the first day of the pay period beginning on or after January 1, 2018; **for most employees this will be Sunday, January 7, 2018**. Enrollees will remain covered and receive the 2017 benefits of the old plan or option until coverage under the new plan becomes effective.

What Must You Do?

- Advise your employees who are enrolled in the plan that is dropping an option (**Table 4**) that if they do not choose a new health plan, they will be automatically transferred into the plan's option as specified in **Table 4**.
- Distribute copies of this list to employees with your agency's notice about Open Season.
- Follow up with employees in the plan and remind them that if they do not choose a new health plan, they will be automatically transferred into the plan's option specified in **Table 4**.
- **Belated changes:** Some employees still might not receive instructions regarding their plan dropping an option. We encourage you to be liberal in accepting belated Open Season changes from employees enrolled in the plan dropping an option listed in **Table 4**.

What Will the Health Plan Do?

- **Plan Notification:** The plan in **Table 4** has been instructed to notify enrollees that their current plan option is being discontinued and that if they do not change to another plan during Open Season, they will be switched automatically into the plan's option specified in **Table 4**.

Table 5: Plans Adding New Options And Enrollment Codes

Table 6: Service Area Expansions Without New Enrollment Codes

Table 7: Service Area Expansions Adding New Enrollment Codes

Table 8: Plan Name Changes

Table 9 New Plan Entering the FEHB Program

What Must You Do?

You must include the plans with new options, the plans with expanded service areas, the plan with name changes, and the new plan entering the FEHB Program (Tables 5-9) when you count the number of eligible tribal employees and place your order for brochures.

SUMMARY OF BENEFITS AND COVERAGE - REMINDER

As a result of the Affordable Care Act, FEHB plans have been providing a summary document on their websites which details information about health plan benefits and coverage. The summary document is also available on our website at www.opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/healthcare/plan-information/summary-of-benefits.

In order to help FEHB enrollees better understand their coverage and allow them to easily compare different plans and plan options, the Summary of Benefits and Coverage (SBC) document includes information on the following:

- Cost - deductibles, copayments, coinsurance, and out-of-pocket limits
- Coverage - covered services, examples of covered services and excluded services
- Rights - rights to continue coverage as well as grievance and appeal rights
- A statement that coverage under the plan qualifies as “minimum essential coverage”
- A statement that the health coverage of the plan does meet the minimum value standard for the benefits the plan provides

The SBC will continue to have a disclaimer indicating that the plan brochure remains the official statement of benefits.

Plans will continue to provide information in their Open Season materials to their enrollees about where to find their SBC on their website as well as how to obtain a paper copy of the SBC. The plans may also have their SBC available at health fairs.

CONCLUSION

Again, this year’s Federal Benefits Open Season will run from Monday, November 13 through Monday, December 11, 2017.

We encourage you and your employees to visit our website at www.opm.gov/openseason for the most up-to-date information. Please note that 2018 Plan information will be posted on our website ahead of Open Season.

We look forward to working with you to ensure Federal employees have a successful Open Season.

Sincerely,

Alan P. Spielman
Director
Healthcare and Insurance

Attachments