



Dear Purchaser,

We know this is a very busy time of year for you as you plan for the beginning of open enrollment. We hope this issue of the Alliance Purchaser Update will help you as you design your health benefit plans.

Some recent studies may give you food for thought. Results from two major surveys, one from [Kaiser Family Foundation \(KFF\)](#) and the other from the [National Business Group on Health \(NBGH\)](#), were published examining trends in employer-sponsored health plans. The Business Roundtable, an advocacy association made up of CEOs of leading U.S. companies, also released a [report calling for a health care policy framework](#) that includes better price and quality transparency and supports market-based wellness solutions.

This is the time of year your employees are making decisions about health care coverage by examining their own health care needs for the year. You have an opportunity to educate and empower them to be savvy health care consumers. We have tools to support you through our [Own Your Health campaign](#) and our newly-published [Choosing Wisely Employer Toolkit](#) (login required). Contact us to learn more.

PURCHASER LIBRARY

[NBGH: Large employers respond to rising benefit costs](#)

According to findings from a June 2014 NBGH survey of 136 of the nation's largest corporations, employers' health care benefits costs will increase by an average of 6.5% in 2015. In response, employers plan to increase cost-sharing, expand consumer-directed health plans, wellness programs and Centers of Excellence usage. New benefit plans for specialty medications and weight management strategies will also be explored.

[Kaiser Family Foundation releases results from 2014 employer health benefits survey](#)

Employer-sponsored health premiums rose three percent in 2014, keeping pace with the year-to-year rise in worker's wages (2.3 percent) and general inflation (2 percent). But deductibles have crept higher over time, with a 47 percent increase since 2009. Overall, the findings shows that more costs are being shifted to workers, but that health care costs overall are better controlled. The survey also examines ways employers will be affected by, or respond to, provisions in the Affordable Care Act.

[Business Roundtable outlines policy strategy to close the gap between health care cost and value](#)

Driving Innovation In The Health Care Marketplace: A CEO Report presents a vision and framework for what the public and private sectors can do over the next decade to spur innovation and replicate successful market-based solutions to make the U.S. health system a global leader in delivering high-quality, affordable health care. Among the solutions offered are better price transparency through all-payer claims databases and better incentives for providers to provide high-value care. The report also features case studies of health care management programs offered at major companies.

[RWJF recommends payers and regulators team up to combat soaring specialty drug costs](#)

One of the chief causes of rising health care costs is the cost of prescription drugs. There have been different approaches taken to moderate these costs, including multi-tiered prescription drug benefit plans. But these plans could discourage consumers with pre-existing conditions from enrolling in certain plans and advocacy groups are examining them for possible discrimination. A new issue brief from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation recommends that payers team up with state and federal regulators to combat the soaring prices of specialty drugs.

[Brief outlines scope of breast cancer and offers actions for employers](#)

The significant financial burden of breast cancer, compounded with the emotional strain of diagnosis and treatment, can create a complex situation for employers. A new action brief from the National Business Coalition on Health outlines the scope of breast cancer as well as how health plans are addressing the issues based on data from eValue8™, the NBCH tool that the Alliance uses to measure health plan performance. The brief highlights actions employers can take to improve breast cancer prevention strategies and to better support workers and dependents facing breast cancer diagnosis and treatment.

[Blood clots not only dangerous, but costly to productivity](#)

About a million episodes of dangerous blood clots – venous thromboembolism (VTE) – occur in the U.S. each year. A new study finds that disabling episodes of VTE impose substantial financial losses on employers. The study is available from the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine. [Read more](#) (subscription required).

HEALTHY WORKFORCE RESOURCES

Each month we share materials from our Own Your Health, Choosing Wisely® and other initiatives that you can use in your employee communications. Feel free to use any or all of these suggested messages as they meet your needs.

[Getting the right care](#)

High-quality health care means getting the right care, at the right time, for the right reason. The quality of health care varies, but trustworthy, public information can help you decide what test or treatment is best for you and if the care meets accepted standards. [Learn to be active in your own health.](#)

[Cardiac imaging—when you need it and when you don't](#)

Like other screening tests, heart imaging can help doctors plan your treatment. But, if you don't have an existing heart condition or symptoms of one, and are low-risk, these tests not only may not help you, but may also expose you to other risks. [Learn what leading medical societies recommend.](#)

[Learn about breast cancer](#)

Whether you're worried about developing breast cancer, making decisions about treatment or trying to stay well after treatment, the American Cancer Society can help. Learn more about breast cancer by visiting www.cancer.org/cancer/breastcancer.

NEWS TO KNOW

[How large employers plan to cope with rising healthcare costs: 4 things to know | Becker's Hospital CFO](#)

The largest corporations in the U.S. share four main strategies for containing health care costs: changing benefit plans to prompt employees to be better health care consumers and implementing employee wellness plans, shifting more costs to workers through higher deductible plans, using private health insurance exchanges and implementing narrow networks of providers.

[Large employers shifting health costs to workforce | Healthcare Dive](#)

Employers still play a large role in the health insurance industry in this country—they cover nearly 50% of people under the age of 65. More companies are implementing consumer-directed plans. Individuals will also be responsible for a larger portion of their health care expenses. Providers will need to plan for financial issues that come with an increased number of patients paying for services out of pocket.

[Large Employers Trimming Healthcare Spending | HealthLeaders Media](#)

Consumer engagement is key issue for the entire health care industry, but this year it will be especially important as more companies move toward consumer-directed health plans, with more costs shifted to workers and incentives for healthy behaviors. This drive also heats up interest in increasing access to price and quality information so that consumers and employers alike can make better health care decisions.

LEARN MORE

Own Your Health

The Own Your Health campaign empowers you to become an active participant in your own health care. The Own Your Health website provides trustworthy information, helpful tips and handy tools to help you take control of your health. Washington Health Alliance partners with organizations to create custom Own Your Health campaigns specific to your audience. [Learn more.](#)

Choosing Wisely

Choosing Wisely® is a campaign designed to provide easy-to-understand guides for getting better, safer, more effective care. It is a partnership between the Alliance, The American Board of Internal Medicine (ABIM), the Washington State Medical Association, and others. [Learn more.](#)

Community Checkup

The Community Checkup is our annual report highlighting health care quality and value at medical groups and hospitals in Washington state. Providers use the data to discover areas for improvement, and consumers to help choose a primary care home. The community as a whole sees the report as a critical component in the overall effort to transform the health care system. The report demonstrates that everyone has room to improve. [Learn more](#)

Follow the Alliance on Twitter

We invite you to follow the Alliance on Twitter [@WAHealthCheckup](#).

Follow the Alliance on LinkedIn

We invite you to follow the Alliance on our [LinkedIn company page](#).

For comments about the Update for Purchasers or to change or unsubscribe your email address, please email John Gallagher at jgallagher@wahealthalliance.org.

The Washington Health Alliance brings together those who give, get and pay for health care to create a high-quality, affordable system for the people of Washington state. Through innovative strategies and initiatives, we help the entire health care system—from exam room to board room—focus on improving quality and value. We are committed to being the catalyst for change for the health care system in Washington.