

Shopping for Benefits: What the Future Holds for Employers and Employees

by Mike Lisa, CEO and Chief Growth Officer

For better or worse, technology is transforming just about every industry. The healthcare and employee benefits industries are no different, whether you're an employer seeking benefits for your workforce or an individual shopping for benefits. Here's how technology will change the insurance-buying process in the near future:

Apps Will Push Value-based Care

This tech shift to shopping for benefits will bring with it the rise of platforms and app-based insurance. The hope is that apps and platforms will make it easier to buy and understand insurance, and easier to get the best healthcare fast. That means high-quality care at a low price at a time that's convenient for patients.

Emerging tech platforms should provide employees with more options for insurance—and a better understanding of those options—and make it easier to manage wellness, healthcare and any insurance coverages. Apps will put more information in front of the average employee/consumer, giving them more freedom to make choices about their care.

The idea is these emerging platforms and apps tie together payroll and HRIS with wellness and healthcare navigator apps to help employees live healthier lives.

Here's how it could work: When an employee isn't feeling well, she first turns to her telemedicine app instead of picking up the phone to make a doctor's appointment or visiting urgent care. Telemedicine is more convenient for her and costs less than a traditional doctor's visit. If the telemedicine provider refers her to a specialist, she can then turn to a health navigator app to find a high-quality specialist at the lowest price for her next appointment.

When she's feeling better, she can use a connected wellness app to record gym visits, meditate, speak to a therapist and earn points for [health and wellness](#) activities like reaching a step-count milestone or getting a preventive checkup. These points can contribute to a real-time insurance premium discount that she can easily view from an app. The app can also present her with the opportunity to add or change voluntary benefits and, during open enrollment, learn about her benefit choices and decide on the best plan.

Apps specific to shopping for benefits will provide more information to healthcare consumers and the necessary tools to make better care decisions. The hope is this technology will help people become healthier, get better care and use insurance more efficiently.

How HR Fits In

Though employees will have the ability to make easy changes to benefit plans—especially voluntary benefits—the role of HR may change, depending on the employer's size.

Large, 1000+ life employers will likely partner with a technology company and a benefits consultant who will manage the platform and the insurance-buying process for employees. Representatives from the HR technology platform, the [benefits consultant](#) and human resources staff will be responsible for educating employees about their options.

Importantly, the employer will continue to sponsor employee benefits. They may present cafeteria-style benefits plans and provide a dollar amount toward the purchase of benefits.

Bigger changes may come for small companies with fewer than 100 employees. Many of these businesses may turn to a professional employer organization (PEO) or other HR outsourcing arrangements with a built-in technology platform. Though healthcare insurance costs will continue to rise, small employers will continue to contribute to employee benefits premiums to help attract and retain talent.

Done right, technology puts more information in front of employees shopping for benefits.

The Imperative for Employers: Communicate and Educate

The only way this shift to platforms, apps and other technology-based solutions will work is if employers, benefits brokers and platform companies themselves work to [educate and communicate](#) with employees about how this all works. Insurance platforms can no longer be staffed with technologists only; they need experts who understand health and welfare benefits in order to onboard employees and teach them how to get the most from their benefits platform.

And while HR's role may change slightly, those teams are still in charge of helping employees learn about the benefits landscape and plan their healthcare and financial wellbeing for the next plan year. HR teams need to focus on communicating through any channel necessary, whether it's email, social media, in-person education meetings or podcasts. It benefits everyone when employees understand how to choose the best plan and make decisions about appropriate care.

Putting more healthcare and insurance information in front of employees when they're shopping for benefits and seeking services can drive them to make smarter decisions and look for better options when possible, but only if they understand how it all works.

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