This Open Season, add it up with the NALC Health Benefit Plan

Take a look at the numbers, and we think you'll agree—the NALC Health Benefit Plan offers the best care for the best value for you and for your family's health care needs.

The NALC Plan offers you comprehensive benefits and a broad choice of in-network health care providers at reasonable rates. Best of all, it's a non-profit plan run by letter carriers, for letter carriers.

This year is special because the Plan has two new options to offer (see below)..

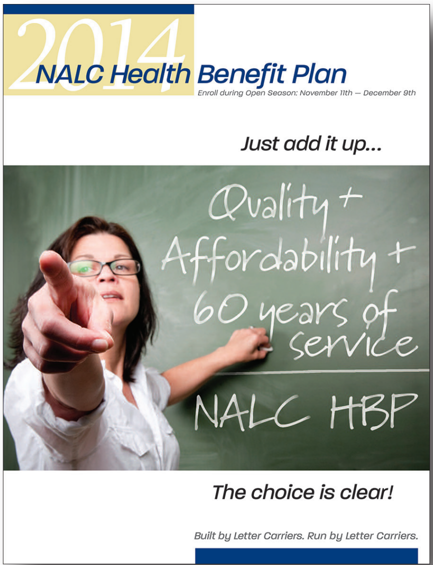
The NALC Health Benefit Plan makes improvements every year to assure that its members have great health care coverage at affordable rates. As the only health plan run by letter carriers, the Plan makes improvements based on your suggestions and requests. And as a not-for-profit plan, all of the Plan's focus is on serving its members.

Open Season for letter carriers to enroll in or switch health care plans is Nov. 11 through Dec. 9. If you aren't yet a member of the NALC Health Benefit Plan, now is the time to look at your needs and consider joining.

"We're confident that if you look at your budget and your health care situation, the NALC Health Benefit Plan will 'add up' as the right one for you," NALC President Fredric Rolando said. "The NALC Health Benefit Plan is unique. Letter carriers created it and letter carriers run it. There's no better health plan to take care of letter carriers and their families."

So how can you get the information you need, and how do you evaluate it to fit your needs?

"We encourage letter carriers to compare our plan with the others available to them during Open Season," Brian Hellman, director of the Health Benefit Plan and New York City Branch 36 member, said. "Our benefits stack up well, and our rates are reasonable, because we never stop trying to improve."



Check out the summary of what is covered, and how the plan works, in the insert in this issue of *The Postal Record*. To compare plans and get other information about enrollment during Open Season, go to opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/healthcare/plan-information.

For 2014, the NALC Health Benefit Plan will offer the comprehensive High Option health insurance package it always has offered. The High Option is a fee-for-service plan with a preferred provider (PPO) network that offers the most benefits with the least amount of out-of-pocket costs. It's the choice for more than 220,000 active and retired letter carriers and family members who rely on it to meet their needs.

The High Option plan pays for a wide range of preventive care for adults and children at 100 percent when you use a PPO provider. In addition, you will pay only a $20 copayment for each primary care or specialist office visit when the services are rendered by a PPO provider.

The deductible for the High Option plan is $300 for Self Only coverage and $600 for self and family coverage.

If you're thinking about expanding your family, the Plan's 100 percent benefit package for maternity includes payment in full when billed by a PPO provider for many pregnancy and birth-related costs, including routine prenatal and post-birth visits, sonograms, fetal monitoring, amniocentesis, anesthesia, delivery and breast-feeding equipment rental.

The High Option plan provides reasonable prescription drug benefits, too. For generics bought from a network retail pharmacy, you pay just 20 percent; when ordering by mail, you pay $8 for up to a 60-day supply or $12 for up to a 90-day supply. Formulary brand drugs cost just 30 percent at a retail network pharmacy, $43 for up to a 60-day supply by mail and $65 for up to a 90-day supply by mail. Non-formulary and specialty drugs have different rates. Your out-of-pocket costs for most drugs are lower when Medicare is the primary payor. See the plan details for more information.

Based on input from letter carriers and advances in medicine, the NALC Health Benefit Plan adds new benefits each year. The new benefits in the High Option plan for 2014 include:

- 100 percent coverage of annual biometric screening for adults.
- Skin cancer preventive counseling for ages 10-24.
- Counseling for and physical therapy to prevent falls for ages 65 and older.
- Hearing screening for children age 3 at high risk of hearing loss.
- Tetanus-diphtheria, pertussis (Tdap) vaccine for pregnant women.
- 100 percent coverage for removal of a birth-control device and follow-up and management of side effects when rendered by a PPO provider.

Health Benefits for City Carrier Assistants

Health benefits for CCAs are subject to the terms of the Das Award, which set the provisions of the NALC's 2011-2016 National Agreement, and to the requirements of the Affordable Care Act. The Postal Service will offer a USPS Health Care Plan for Noncareer Employees (including CCAs) beginning as early as January 2014. CCAs will be eligible for a $125 bi-weekly contribution from the Postal Service toward the cost of coverage under the USPS plan. Information on the premiums for the USPS plan, including special provisions for those seeking family coverage, is expected to be finalized shortly.

We are currently holding discussions with the Postal Service on the full implementation of the Das Award's health insurance provisions for CCAs, which includes the option to select either of the NALC HBP's two new Consumer Driven Health Plans (see below) if family coverage is desired. [Note: As stated by the Das Award: "If for any reason the USPS Plan is not available to a CCA, or if a CCA elects more than self-only coverage, the Postal Service will make a bi-weekly contribution for any eligible CCA who selects the NALC HBP Consumer Driven Health Plan equal to the greater of (a) $125, or (b) the minimum required by the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, and applicable regulations, for self only."] Details will be shared in the *NALC Bulletin* and on the union's website when they become available. PR

- Coverage of a total of 75 rehabilitative and habilitative physical, occupational and speech therapy visits per calendar year.
- Initial visit or consultation for acupuncture.
- 100 percent coverage of educational classes and nutritional therapy for self-management of diabetes, hyperlipidemia, hypertension and obesity when rendered by a PPO provider.
- Coverage of over-the-counter (OTC) Vitamin D supplements for ages 65 and older, OTC aspirin for men ages 45-79 and women ages 55-70, OTC iron supplements for children ages 6-12 months and prescription oral fluoride supplements for children ages six months to 5 years when purchased through a preferred or network pharmacy (prescription required).
- Coverage of OTC folic acid for women capable of becoming pregnant, when purchased through a preferred or network pharmacy (prescription required).
- The Plan will pay the Self Only premium for the Cigna*Plus* Savings discount dental program when you are enrolled in a Self Only High Option plan and complete a Health Risk Assessment (HRA), and the Self and Family premium when you are enrolled in Self and Family High Option and an HRA is completed for two family members.

The High Option plan also offers benefits if you have Medicare as the primary payor. The plan pays for all out-of-pocket medical costs that Medicare doesn't—deductibles, co-payments and co-insurance charges—for doctor visits, procedures and hospitalization. It also gives Medicare recipients access to lower out-of-pocket costs for prescription drugs. Having the NALC Health Benefit Plan in addition to your Medicare coverage is a great way to assure that you won't be taken by surprise by unexpected costs.

To give letter carriers a broader range of affordable health care coverage, the plan will offer two new choices for 2014—the Value Option and the Consumer-Driven Health Plan (CDHP).

Like the High Option plan, these choices include a range of benefits for you and your family, including 100 percent coverage of preventive care.

Unlike the High Option, both the Value Option and CDHP offer a personal care account (PCA) for each enrollee. The PCA is a great way to control your personal medical costs while enjoying the protection of an affordable health plan that will cover major medical costs if they arise.

The Health Benefit Plan adds money to each enrollee's PCA each calendar year to pay for medical costs, including medication. For example, if you are ill and go to an in-network doctor who charges $60 for the visit, the doctor will submit your claim to the plan and $60 will be deducted

Flexible spending accounts help lower your tax bill

There's another way for letter carriers to save money on health care during Open Season—opening a Flexible Spending Account (FSA).

By authorizing the Postal Service to deduct a few dollars from your paycheck each pay period to deposit in an FSA, you avoid income taxes on the funds. With a few exceptions, most enrollees can deposit up to $2,500 annually in an FSA. The payments go into your FSA automatically, and there's nothing to report on your income tax return.

With the money in an FSA, you can get same-year reimbursement for medical expenses. A medical FSA can cover out-of-pocket expenses such as copayments or deductibles, and also vision care, eyeglasses or contact lenses, dental procedures and medication. It can even pay for over-the-counter drugs like aspirin or supplies like contact lens solution.

You can also open a separate FSA to pay for child-care expenses like day care for a child under 13 or incapable of self-care.

These covered expenses are subject to limitations, so be sure to check the details before enrolling. Go to opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/flexible-spending-accounts for more information.

Enrollment in an FSA does not carry forward year to year, so if you currently have an FSA, you must enroll again during Open Season (Nov. 11 through Dec. 9) if you want to continue it in 2014.

To enroll in or make changes to an FSA, you can use any of the following options:

- Go to liteblue.usps.gov or blue.usps.gov on the USPS intranet, log in with your employee ID and PIN, choose epayroll and log in again.
- Enroll at any employee self-service kiosk.
- Call 877-477-EASE (877-477-3273) and choose menu option 1, or request help from the Human Resources Shared Service Center by choosing option 5 and requesting "benefits" when prompted.

For more information, go to opm.gov/healthcare-insurance/flexible-spending-accounts. PR

Open Season for Thrift Savings Plan

There's another important open season for letter carriers to think about. Between Nov. 15 and Jan. 31, career letter carriers can open or make changes to their Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) retirement savings accounts.

Saving money with a TSP can be a great way to assure that you have a comfortable retirement. The TSP works much like a 401(k) plan offered by many private-sector employers. Chances are you already have a TSP account—federal employees in the FERS retirement system are given one automatically. An amount you choose is deducted from each paycheck to go into your account.

For employees in FERS, the Postal Service will add its own contribution to your account based on how much you put in, in addition to the contribution equal to 1 percent of your salary that the Postal Service adds automatically. Some of these automatic accounts already deduct 3 percent of an employee's paycheck and match that amount.

USPS matches up to 5 percent of your pay with its own contributions, so consider contributing at least that amount to maximize the matching contribution.

You decide how the money in your account is invested from a choice of several investment funds. You can choose to defer federal income taxes on some or all the money in the account until you take it out—a traditional retirement account—for retirement so that your investments can grow faster. You also can contribute money you've already paid taxes on—a Roth account—which will be tax-free when you withdraw it.

During TSP open season, you can increase or decrease the amount deducted from your paycheck and change your investment fund choices. A second open season is May 15 through July 31. TSPs are available only to career employees.

For complete information about TSPs and how to make changes during open season, go to tsp.gov. PR

from your PCA. You pay nothing. If there is money left over in your PCA, it carries over to the next year (subject to certain limits).

In the CDHP, the annual amount added to the PCA is $1,200 for Self Only enrollment or $2,400 for Self and Family enrollment. In the Value Option, the amounts are $100 for Self Only and $200 for Self and Family.

If you use all of the money in the PCA for the year, further medical expenses for that year are covered as under a traditional insurance plan. First, a deductible applies. For both the CDHP and the Value Plan, the deductible is $2,000 for Self Only enrollment and $4,000 for Self and Family enrollment for in-network providers; $4,000 for Self Only and $8,000 for Self and Family for out-of-network providers.

The CDHP and Value Plans limit the total amount you pay in out-of-pocket costs for a year. The in-network out-of-pocket maximum for a Self Only enrollment is $6,000 and $12,000 for Self and Family enrollment. For out-of-network, the out-of-pocket limit is $12,000 for Self Only and $24,000 for Self and Family. There are some costs that members are responsible for that cannot be counted toward these maximum amounts, so please read the brochure carefully.

"We think every letter carrier should have access to affordable health care coverage and a wider range of choices," HBP Director Hellman said. "We designed these new options with this in mind, and I hope carriers take the time to consider them. Of course, career carriers can still enjoy the High Option Plan they've relied on in past years to provide the highest level of benefits and the lowest out-of-pocket costs."

All three choices—High Option, Value Option and CDHP—have been partnered with Cigna HealthCare to give members access to the Cigna Open Access Plus PPO network, which offers more than 2 million participating family doctors and specialists and more than 22,000 general acute care hospitals and facilities nationwide. All also come with access to more than 67,800 in-network pharmacies through prescription benefit manager CVS/Caremark.

Chances are that your medical provider or pharmacy already is eligible to receive in-network benefits through any of the three plans.

(These benefits are summarized; see the 2014 official brochure, RI-71-009, for full details and exclusions for these and other benefits.)

These great benefits come at reasonable rates. In 2014, the letter carrier's share of the High Option premium for career carriers (hired before Jan. 12, 2013) will be $58.02 biweekly for Self Only and $114.59 biweekly for Self and Family. For carriers on Medicare, the rates are $161.22 per month for Self Only and $327.27 for Self and Family. Lower rates and different benefits apply to the Value Option and CDHP; see the plan's official brochure for details.

"We're proud of the way we constantly strive to improve the health care of letter carriers at affordable rates," Hellman said. "We know what letter carriers need in health care, we listen to their concerns and input, and we respond in many ways. The benefits we provide are designed with letter carriers in mind. It's our Plan."

As a Plan that focuses on its customers, not on profits, the NALC Health Benefit Plan emphasizes customer service. All of its employees work from one building—its headquarters in Ashburn, VA—including its Customer Service Representatives, who have the training and experience to provide the help you need.

Add it up—quality plus affordability plus more than 60 years of service equals the NALC Health Benefit Plan. PR

NALC investigates options for CCA retirement savings accounts

NALC is actively reviewing options for retirement savings accounts for CCAs, beginning in 2014. The union's lawyers and investment advisors are studying alternative vehicles for CCAs to save for retirement before they are converted to career status and become eligible for participation in the Federal Employees' Retirement System (FERS), which includes the federal Thrift Savings Plan (TSP). NALC is seeking to sponsor such a vehicle that will maximize tax savings for CCA members and minimize investment costs while offering a product that easily can be rolled-over into the TSP once CCAs become career city carriers. Details will be shared in the *NALC Bulletin* and on nalc.org when they become available. PR