

How employers can improve employee health literacy

Employers are uniquely positioned to impact the health literacy of their employees and, ultimately, influence better health and financial outcomes. By incorporating the following tips throughout the year, employees will be better equipped to learn what they need to do to ensure they receive the best and safest medical care in a cost-effective way

Use clear and simple messaging

When an employer creates and sends out communication materials, the goal is for the reader to take action. Keep it simple. The number of messages will depend on the information needs of the intended users. As a general guideline, don't use more than four main messages. Clearly state the actions you want your employee to take. And include the consequences for the employee if he or she does not take action.

Get rid of complex jargon

Insurance industry professionals throw around a lot of jargon — OOP, deductibles, PCP, chronic conditions, comorbidities, etc. When rolling out employee communications, ask your insurance provider and benefits consultant to include descriptions of benefits and how to use the benefits in consistent, easy-to-understand language. This includes their member website or portal, Explanation of Benefits (EOB), emails, and mailers.

Treat everyone the same

No matter their job title, assume all employees may have difficulty understanding health, wellness and benefits communications. Create an environment where employees of all literacy levels can thrive and use simple, easy-to-understand language

Empower employees to take charge of their health

When people take an active role in their healthcare, research shows they fare better in both health and financial outcomes. Increase employee confidence in their ability to advocate for themselves by holding workshops. You can also develop brief email, poster and video messages. Topics could include how to talk to a doctor, how to get more support when you need it, and how to ask questions about insurance coverage.

Identify a navigator

Consider a current staff member or external support person who can help employees navigate the complex world of benefits available. Perhaps the medical plan also has a department focused on advocacy for your plan members (both employees and family members).

Technology isn't for everyone

While our digital infrastructure grows daily, don't leave behind those who aren't as comfortable or familiar with technology. Depending on the range of ages and skills in your workforce, use a variety of communication methods to share health and wellness information. This includes bathroom readers, emails, texts, and verbal updates at team huddles or meetings.

Repeat and repeat and repeat

Don't expect your once-a-year open enrollment presentation to be memorable enough that your employees remember all your generous benefits. Plan year-round campaigns and communications using frequent but brief messages. Create a consistent call-out box or section for tips on which benefits are available, how to use them and what role they play in helping employees manage their health.

Don't forget the decision makers of the household

While you may give employees a lot of information while they are at work, the person making decisions about when and where to go for healthcare may not be getting that same information translated to them. Consider home mailings, invitations to open enrollment meetings, and other ways to ensure all family members on the medical plan receive credible sources of health and wellness information.