

How Telemedicine Value-Adds Can Enhance a Benefits Package

By GIL YOUMANS



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When you want or need to buy something, you expect to do a quick search online, drop the item in your shopping cart and hit purchase. Whether it's next-day shipping or live streaming all the episodes of your favorite show's newest season, instant access is the standard.

WHY SHOULD IMMEDIATE ACCESS TO MEDICAL CARE BE ANY DIFFERENT?

Well, it's not. More employers are adding telemedicine to their health benefits package to help reduce costs

and improve access to care. In fact, 80 percent of employers will offer a telehealth benefit to their employees by 2018, according to a Towers Watson survey.

To help businesses keep their companies healthy and productive, more insurance companies are offering telehealth benefits and resources.

Partnering with the right employee benefits provider can help you stand out among the competition by providing services beyond just basic health and voluntary benefits.

TELEMEDICINE CAN INCREASE EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY

When employees don't feel well, it may mean time out of the office at a doctor appointment or at home recovering. Time away from work can have a big impact on your customers' business when it comes to productivity.

Because many people don't have time or think they can't afford to be sick, they may put off a visit. Without seeking early medical care, something as minor as a sinus infection can get worse, which means your customers' employees must take time off work

and may be out of the office for longer than expected.

When your customers' employees have 24/7 virtual access to board-certified physicians, it can reduce unnecessary time away from work. A doctor who is available on the phone or through secure video conferencing on computers, tablets or mobile devices can save employees from having to leave work for in-person appointments. The more employees who avoid doctor visits and get an early diagnosis and treatment for an illness, the more money stays in the employers' pockets.

TELEMEDICINE CAN CONTROL COSTS

Telemedicine can help your clients cut down the cost of health care as it could potentially deliver more than \$6 billion in a year in health care savings to U.S. companies, according to Towers Watson's report *Current Telemedicine Technology Could Mean Big Savings*.

A quarter of Americans in a recent Bankrate survey said they have skipped medical attention because of the out-of-pocket costs. The survey found older millennials (ages 27 to 36) were most likely to avoid the doctor because of costs.

VIRTUAL CARE IS ACCEPTABLE CARE

But, you may be asking if people are okay with not seeing their physician in person? The answer is yes. Seventy-six percent of patients believe the access to care is more important than the need for human interactions with their health care providers, according to NTT Data's *Trends in Telehealth*.

ADDITIONAL WAYS TO OFFER PROTECTION

Your clients are always looking for ways to keep their employees happy and healthy while giving them added financial protection. In addition to telemedicine, here are some other value-added services and coverages a top benefits partner can help you can bring to your clients — many available at low or no cost under certain conditions:

- **Legal Document Assistance.** According to Rocket Lawyer's 2016 Make-a-Will-Month survey, more

than 64 percent of Americans don't have a will. The main reason why: They haven't had time to do it. Consider partnering with a company that offers complimentary legal document preparation. In addition to wills, this service includes power of attorney, health care directive and lease documents.

- **Identity monitoring and restoration.** According to Credit.com, an estimated 15.4 million consumers were affected by some kind of identity theft in 2016. Some benefits providers partner with ID theft protection companies that will offer free identity theft protection monitoring for one year.



- **Financial education.** When it comes to retirement savings, about one in four U.S. adults say they don't save any portion of their household income for retirement, according to the Harris Poll 2016 Consumer Financial Literacy Survey. Consider partnering with a company that offers a financial education program, budgeting tools and promotes free external websites such as WorkLife, which have a wealth of information on benefits and health.
- **Discounts on drugs and medical services.** Discount programs can complement coverage by helping pay for services that are restricted or not covered. This is especially important if your customers offer a high-deductible health plan that leaves employees with considerable financial exposure to out-of-pocket costs. Bankrate's Money Pulse Survey found that 56 percent of people say they're either somewhat or very worried they won't be able to afford health care coverage in the future.
- **Flexible benefits plans.** Encourage

your clients to talk with their employees about this valuable way to pay for some health care expenses and insurance premiums with pretax income. Not only can they make benefits more affordable, they can help your clients reduce payroll taxes, too.

- **Benefits communication support.** Encourage your clients to maintain year-round benefits conversations with their employees. Effective communication drives stronger participation in the benefits program and ensures your clients see the return on their investment. Some benefits providers offer communication tools and support at no addi-

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tional cost as part of their services.

As the world continues to do more business online, and the insurance industry continues to upgrade technology, consider telemedicine for your clients. It's a fast-growing trend that can save employers and employees time and money. And it's just one of many low- or no-cost services and benefits you may be able to add to your portfolio to provide greater value at a time when your clients are struggling with benefits costs. By partnering with the right benefits provider, you can bring much more than insurance products to help your clients get the most out of their benefits program. ★



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