



Group Benefits Advisory Committee Meeting

October 5, 2021



**Group Benefits Advisory Committee (GBAC) Meeting
Employees Retirement System of Texas
1836 San Jacinto, Austin, TX 78701
October 5, 2021**

GBAC Present

Janet Bezner, Committee Chair, Texas State University
Jennifer Cawley, Texas Association of Life and Health Insurers
Barbara Cherry, Texas Tech University Health Science Center
Missy Kittner, McLennan Community College
Megan LaVoie, Office of Court Administration
Matthew Miller, Department of Motor Vehicles
Jan Thomas, Lottery Commission
Gary White, Retiree
Sandra White, Department of Criminal Justice

GBAC Not Present

James Dobbins, Retiree
Teresa Nelson, Department of Savings and Mortgage Lending

ERS Staff Present

Porter Wilson, Executive Director
Cathy Terrell, Deputy Executive Director
Cynthia Hamilton, Acting General Counsel
William "Shack" Nail, Special Projects & Policy Advisor
Jennifer Chambers, Director of Government Relations
Bernie Hajovsky, Director of Enterprise Planning
Robin Hardaway, Director of Customer Benefits
Diana Kongevick, Director of Group Benefits
Kathryn Tesar, Director of Benefits Communications
Machelle Pharr, Chief Financial Officer
Keith Yawn, Director of Strategic Initiatives
Lauren Russell, Group Benefits
Blaise Duran, Group Benefits
Angelica Harborth, Group Benefits
Mary Jane Wardlow, Executive Office
Amy Chamberlain, Executive Office
Lacy Wolff, Executive Office

Meeting of the Group Benefits Advisory Committee

1. Opening Remarks and Introductions

Ms. Bezner opened the meeting with committee member and staff introductions.

2. Recap of 2021 Legislative Session

Ms. Chambers and Ms. Russell provided a legislative recap on matters with impact to agency and institution employees and retirees. The recap included an overview of recently introduced legislation, including funding levels for employee, retiree and dependent health coverage; member cost share for insulin; coverage of diagnostic imaging services to detect breast cancer; changes to prior authorization requirements for certain providers; allowing a retiree to serve as one of three elected ERS trustees; creation of a public self-service cost estimator tool for medical procedures; and introduction of a legacy payment schedule and new retirement benefit structure for state employees hired after August 31, 2022. Committee members discussed potential impacts of the recently introduced legislation.

3. ERS Rider 17

Ms. Chambers noted that Senate Bill 1 includes a rider for ERS to engage a third party vendor to examine alternative methods to deliver the current benefits supplied under the Group Benefits Program (GBP). Chambers asked the committee members to share their views on the current structure of GBP health benefits and asked what alternative methods should be considered by ERS and its third party vendor. Committee members discussed some of the challenges faced by health plan participants under the current structure. Challenges include locating high-quality, low-cost health care services, particularly in rural markets; navigating the referral process through the participant's primary care physician; and disparity in the level of understanding of health and voluntary benefits across the GBP population. ERS staff and the third-party benefits consultant will take these challenges into consideration when developing the report for the legislative entities identified in the rider. The report will be finalized in August 2022.

4. GBP Updates

Ms. Kongevick and staff provided the committee with updates on several GBP items, including the recent successful transition of Flexible Spending Account administration services to Payflex Systems, Inc.; the status of offering long-term care insurance coverage; statistics for COVID-19 testing, vaccinations and hospitalizations for health plan participants; the utilization rate, types of procedures shopped for, participant rewards and plan cost savings generated from the HealthSelectShoppERSSM program; and external fertility resources available to plan participants.

5. Wellness Updates

Ms. Wolff informed the committee that Naturally Slim, one of the weight management programs offered at no cost to HealthSelect participants, has re-branded to WondrTM. In April, ERS launched a podcast, ERS Walk & Talk, that Wolff hosts and in which she talks with mentors, friends and experts about health and wellness topics. The podcasts run about 25 minutes and are available on the ERS website. Lastly, ERS is hosting a virtual wellness fair October 18 – 22, with featured speakers presenting on topics including but not limited to nutrition, fitness, mindfulness, and ways to interact with our pets. Event registration and additional details are available on the ERS website.

Some committee members noted the challenge of eating healthy faced by many state employees working in restricted physical environments. ERS staff will investigate hosting virtual sessions to provide healthy tips for on-the-job lunches.

6. Discussion of Topics for Future Meetings

The committee asked that the next meeting agenda include a follow-up discussion on ERS Rider 17 and the alternative methods for delivering current GBP benefits; an update on the impact of COVID-19 on participants and the health plans; an update on the HealthSelectShoppERSSM program; the long-term outlook for telehealth in a post-pandemic environment; and an overview of new value-added enhancements to the Texas Dental Choice plan participants. Additional topics of interest for future meetings will be solicited electronically prior to the next meeting.

7. Set Date of Next Committee Meeting

The date of the next committee meeting was set for the afternoon of Tuesday, March 29, 2022.