

Navigating Open Enrollment in a Changed World

QUICK READ



Open enrollment is the busiest time of year for human resource (HR) professionals, and this year brings new challenges. As organizations gear up for open enrollment, mental health concerns are at critical levels and employers are rolling out return-to-workplace plans during an ongoing global pandemic. This year will require a little more preparation, a lot more communication, and some extra support for your HR teams.

Key Issues Impacting Employees and HR Teams

During the pandemic, HR professionals saw a shift in their responsibilities. The scope of their work expanded as employees transitioned to remote or hybrid work experiences at the height of COVID-19, and health, wellbeing, and maintaining strong corporate culture continue to be top priorities for organizational leaders.

With the added burden of reimagining the employee wellbeing experience and keeping workers engaged despite being offsite, HR professionals are also managing their own rising stress levels. Human Resource Executive's annual survey of HR professionals found that 9 in 10 experienced an increase in stress levels at work in 2020, with nearly half reporting a dramatic increase in stress.

As open enrollment season approaches, share these strategies with your colleagues to help them identify the needs of employees as they evaluate and select their health and wellness benefit options without creating additional stress for themselves.



Understand Your Populations

As organizations prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion policies and practices in the workplace, HR teams are tasked with diversifying their health and wellbeing benefit options. Tailoring benefits to meet the unique needs of each member of your workforce is critical, especially as employees face potential mental health concerns, financial strain, poor work-life balance, childcare struggles, ongoing fear of COVID-19, and return-to-office anxiety.

Understanding the needs of your workforce is an essential first step to improving total population health outcomes and employee engagement in the coming year. For example, employees who regularly engage in physical labor (e.g., manufacturing, construction) may require more musculoskeletal health and sleep support to ensure continued safety at work. For high-risk workers or those with preexisting conditions who need a little more motivation, one-on-one support like health coaching, guides, and digital therapeutics will be useful.

If you aren't sure what benefits your employees need, just ask them! Sending out an anonymous survey is an excellent way to get honest feedback from your populations.

HR professionals will also need to consider the following:

- Age
- Industry/job function
- Cultural identity
- Gender identity
- Social determinants of health
- Preexisting health conditions



Communication is Key

Before open enrollment season begins, HR teams and organizational leaders must be aligned on employee benefits. HR and leadership teams should review the proposed benefits package, especially if new programs have been added or changes have been made to existing benefits.

When engaging employees in open enrollment, giving employees ample time to review their benefits package, ask questions, or plan to attend any open enrollment meetings will increase the likelihood that they will make an informed decision when it comes time to select their benefits.

HR teams should issue communications through multiple channels to ensure they reach every member of the workforce. Consider a combination of all-company email blasts, virtual and in-person informative meetings, onsite signage, and digital communications. However, taking a mobile-first approach will likely be the most effective strategy. Leveraging mobile-first communications—such as your current employee wellbeing platform—will help HR teams reach Gen Z, millennials, and frontline workers without excluding desk workers and older employees.



New Considerations for Hybrid Workforces

With high levels of return-to-work anxiety and a desire for better work-life balance, having flexibility in one's work environment has become a top priority for many employees during the pandemic. While some industries—such as healthcare, manufacturing, retail, food service, and education—cannot accommodate remote working, some companies in office-based industries are opting to allow employees to stay completely or partially remote for the foreseeable future. It also expands the talent pool for recruiting and retention. This raises the question for HR workers: How do we effectively support the needs of remote employees?

For most companies, employee benefits extend far beyond healthcare to include some or all aspects of health and wellbeing. The pandemic has demonstrated the importance of supporting physical, mental, social, financial, and family health in the workplace. Healthy, happy employees are productive employees, after all. These benefits should be inclusive of all employees regardless of location.

Again, taking a mobile-first approach will aid in eliminating barriers to access and utilization of these offerings. Some great examples of employee benefits that can support a hybrid or fully remote workforce include:

- Telehealth and teletherapy
- One-on-one telephonic and onsite health coaching
- Digital therapeutics for chronic condition prevention and management
- Online social group boards
- Virtual company-wide wellbeing challenges
- Musculoskeletal health programs
- Family planning tools
- Mindfulness and stress management programs
- Childcare

By offering a variety of virtual employee benefits, you increase the likelihood that your dispersed teams will participate in these benefits, stay connected with their peers and the workplace culture, and become healthier, more engaged workers.

Make It Easy

Perhaps the most significant barrier to a successful open enrollment season is complexity. The more benefits your organization offers, the more critical it is to make this information easy to access and understand.

Presenting employees with an overwhelming document that outlines every aspect of your organization's benefits offerings will discourage them from taking the time to review their options thoroughly. Instead, HR teams should create a digital, easy-to-navigate document library that details all benefits and can be accessed from

both mobile and desktop. This allows employees to see a simplified overview of their benefits with the option to read more about the benefits that most interest them.

Another way to make it easier for employees to learn more about their benefits is to host an open enrollment fair. This allows them to connect with the HR team, ask questions, and explore their options. Depending on where your employees work, this can be done onsite, virtually, or both.



Start Early and Set a Schedule

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, HR teams should develop a set of detailed schedules—one that outlines critical dates for HR and workplace leaders and another for employees. Adhering to a plan can help support a gradual rollout of information rather than one large information dump on the first day of open enrollment. Whether it's a weekly video, email, or Q&A session, a slow rollout allows HR teams the opportunity to highlight one or two key benefits at a time. Not only does this make the information feel more approachable, but it also increases awareness of specific benefits and keeps open enrollment top of mind across the organization.

Setting deadlines well in advance will help HR professionals and all other employees mentally prepare for the season. Once open enrollment commences, HR teams should issue regular reminders and communications to ensure employees review and enroll in the benefits that best fit their needs. Like all communications, outreach through various mediums is key to reaching all members of your workforce. Sending weekly reminders via email and through your digital wellbeing platform will ensure onsite and offsite teams receive consistent outreach regarding open enrollment.

Maximizing Your Employee Benefits Investments

From enabling communication across your dispersed workforce to increasing visibility of benefits beyond healthcare, Homebase for Health® brings all the great employee benefits you offer together in one easy-to-access place. Offering a mobile-first experience with desktop capabilities and AI-driven recommendations tailored to each user, your employees can quickly discover the right benefits at the right time to ensure the best health outcomes across your workforce.

Our goal at Virgin Pulse is to help organizations, health plans, and the people they serve to eliminate uncertainty by making it easier for people to understand and take action towards their personal goals. Homebase for Health® unlocks the value of all your health investments. By integrating your wellbeing, conditions management, benefits navigation, partner programs, and point solutions into an intelligent, customizable, and “better together” ecosystem, your organization is empowered to deliver a unified, highly personal, change-enabling experience for your populations, no matter where they are on their wellbeing journey.



Simplify the employee benefits experience for your HR teams and employees alike—from open enrollment to utilization. [Connect with a Virgin Pulse wellbeing expert today!](#)

Learn more at virginpulse.com Find us on [facebook](#) | [twitter](#) | [linkedin](#)