

WAITING
FOR THE
dust
TO settle



with mary drueke

AS MOST PEOPLE are looking forward to exciting new beginnings of spring - warmer days, green lawns and beautiful flowers; those of us in the health insurance industry are buckling down for a flurry of changes that will occur over the rest of 2013. For almost three years, we have been anticipating these changes brought on by the passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) in September 2010, also known as Health Care Reform. Those changes are now on the horizon and will affect every individual in the United States in some way.

Most of the initial provisions of Health Care Reform had positive effects, expanding benefits for individuals currently covered through a health insurance plan; or allowing individuals who might have been removed from a plan to keep their health insurance. These requirements include removing annual and lifetime benefit limits on essential benefits; always covering emergency services as in-network benefits, covering dependent children up to the age of 26 and removing pre-existing condition limitations on children under the age of 19. One of the most popular and utilized changes is the coverage of preventive benefits at 100% with no annual limits.

The biggest parts of Health Care Reform will be shaping up this year and be effective January 1, 2014. Beginning with this date, there will be an Individual Mandate requiring all American citizens and legal residents to have 'qualified' medical insurance. This coverage can be purchased through a variety of sources, including individual plans, group plans provided by an employer, Medicare and Medicaid plans and military and veteran plans. All individuals will also be eligible to purchase insurance through the public Marketplace or the Exchange. Basically, the Marketplace will be a website where individuals go to purchase health insurance; just as the Kayak or Travelocity website is used to purchase airline tickets. Although we do not yet know the details of those plans or how the Marketplace will look, we do know there will be a variety of choices available and premium and/or out of pocket subsidies available for those who qualify.

One of the biggest questions people are asking is "Will my employer continue to offer medical benefits?" Offering health insurance to their employees is still one of the best ways for employers to attract and retain the best and most qualified employees. And it will still probably be the most affordable way for most of us to get our health insurance. As advisors to many of these employers, we are spending the majority of our time helping employers navigate through the myriad of choices and alternatives. There is no "EASY" button, nor does one solution fit all employers. Most employers still believe that providing benefits is important to not only the success of their businesses, but to the health and happiness of their employees.

There are still many questions about Health Care Reform looming on the horizon. Although we do not fully understand how this legislation is going to affect the health insurance industry and the future of medical care, we do know that when the dust settles it will be a new frontier!

For more information, please contact your trusted advisor at Swartzbaugh-Farber – 'Client Centered – Client Advocates™'.

