

The Worth of a Smile...

Dental coverage is a valuable benefit for attracting and retaining employees

The core of your employee benefits package typically includes life and health insurance and retirement plans. But did you know you can enrich your benefits package and create a better value for your employees by adding supplemental products— often at little or no cost to you, the employer?

These days, one of those supplemental products — dental insurance — is proving to be a significant contributor to the value of a benefits package.

How do employees feel?

Among employees, dental insurance is the third most requested employee benefit, ranked behind medical insurance and a retirement plan but ahead of life insurance.¹ In fact, dental insurance was considered to be a valuable benefit by 80% of graduating students and alumni in a survey of attitudes toward benefits.²

Employers tend to agree. **Two-thirds of employers see dental coverage as an essential part of their benefits package** according to the National Association of Dental Plans 2008 Purchaser Behavior Survey.

Understanding the importance of dental health

The link between dental and general health has been making the news since the U.S. Surgeon General's report on oral health in 2000. The startling statistics reported by researchers are helping Americans understand the importance of good dental health. In fact, nearly 80% of respondents in the National Oral Health Survey took dental health into account when rating their overall health.

Dental insurance is listed among the **top five** most valued employee benefits by graduating students and alumni.²

1. Medical insurance
2. Yearly salary increases
3. Retirement plan
4. Dental insurance
5. Life insurance

Ironically, however, Americans' behavior doesn't always line up with their values. Though they acknowledge the importance of dental health, **more than half of insured individuals still don't visit the dentist regularly.**³

Employers may need to stress the importance of good dental health when talking to employees about their benefits.

The positive results of good dental health

Improved overall health

- Oral cancer is more common than leukemia and the following cancers: ovarian, thyroid, kidney, pancreatic and esophageal. It also has a higher mortality rate than these diseases because it is rarely diagnosed in the early stages.⁴
- Poor dental health has been linked to serious systemic health conditions, including periodontal disease, diabetes, heart disease, low-birth-weight babies and even pancreatic cancer and arthritis.
- Many medical conditions are first identified during a dental exam. For example, 52% of oral cancers, 28% of bulimia cases and 26% of diabetes cases are first diagnosed during a dental exam.⁵

Lower overall health spending

- Every dollar spent on preventive dental care saves four dollars in restorative dental care.⁶
- The preventive care, early detection and treatment that dental benefits encourage save the U.S. \$4 billion annually.⁷

Fewer sick days

Each year dental illness causes:

- Almost 2.5 million days of absence from work.⁸
- 164 million lost work hours⁹
- 6.1 million days of bed disability
- 12.7 million days of restricted activity¹⁰
- 51 million dependent school hours missed, which often means a parent must take off work as well.¹¹

“The overwhelming sentiment among respondents is that they think **oral healthcare is healthcare.**”

Robert Klaus, president and chief executive officer, Oral Health America³

89%

of large employees offer dental benefits.

54%

of large and small employees (combined) offer dental benefits.

Overall, **40%**

of American employees lack dental benefits.

NADP: Fact Sheet on Dental Benefits, March 2003

The cost of not providing dental benefits

Three out of four Americans have some form of gum disease.¹² Left untreated, gum disease can create serious health conditions that lead to missed work, high medical bills and even death.

With health care costs on the rise, employers and employees need to work together to lower all health care risks. Not only is it important for employers to provide dental insurance as a health benefit, they should encourage employees to access regular dental care to help stay healthy.

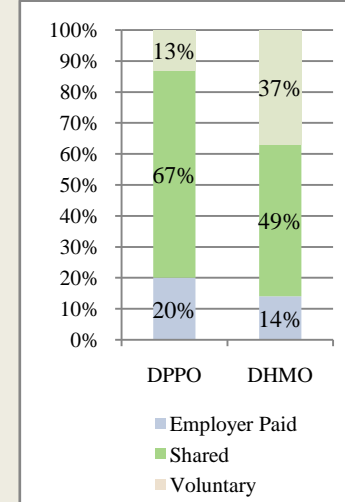
Making dental benefits an affordable part of your package

The fact is, employees are nearly twice as likely to get dental care if they have dental insurance.¹³ And employees look to their employer to make dental coverage available.

These days, cost control is an important factor in benefits package designs. Whereas many employers still offer 100% employer-paid dental coverage, there is a trend of shifting costs to employees. **Employers may elect to share monthly costs with employees or to offer dental as a “voluntary” benefit.** Voluntary benefits are provided to employees on an optional basis and are 100% employee paid, but they provide the benefits and discounts available through group purchasing.

Even when dental benefits are offered as a voluntary benefit, employees appreciate the extra protection dental insurance provides. And by offering dental benefits, employers communicate concern for their employees’ wellbeing, which can motivate employees to take more responsibility for their overall health.

Average Funding Sources for Employer-Based Dental Benefits



*America's Oral Health:
A Market Report on Dental Benefits*

¹ National Association of Dental Plans 2005 Group Purchaser Behavior Study

² National Association of Colleges and Employers 2006 Graduating Student & Alumni Survey, June 2006

³ “Do you See What They See: Patient Perspectives on Oral Healthcare,” *Inside Dentistry*, March 2007

⁴ Oral Health in America, 2001-2002

⁵ Colgate Oral Pharmaceuticals and Institute of Medicine

⁶ National Institute of Health

⁷ “Health insurers open up, say Ah!; to getting in on dental market,” *Business Courier*, Nov. 3, 2003

⁸ Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General

⁹ Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General

¹⁰ Health Insurance Underwriter

¹¹ Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General

¹² Oral Health Report, 2001

¹³ National Association of Dental Plans