

Empowering Professionals, Enhancing Benefits: 2024 Annual Benefits Forum

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“We are in this field because we care about people and want them to live their healthiest lives.”

— Jennifer Birdsall,
clinical director, ComPsych and speaker at 2024 Annual Benefits Forum

Birdsall's words during her presentation, *Supporting Caregivers in the Workplace*, perfectly encompass the atmosphere, attendees and topics presented at this year's Employers Health Annual Benefits Forum. The inaugural two-day event was held March 5 and 6 in Columbus, Ohio and was attended by over 200 benefits professionals. Guests traveled from throughout the U.S., including Texas, Oklahoma and Florida to the Hilton Columbus Polaris Hotel.

Over the two days, the hotel's ballroom was full of attendees who heard from over 20 seasoned benefits professionals on the latest in the employee benefits industry. General sessions included legal experts, certified employee benefit specialists and dynamic panels featuring employers and pharmacy benefit consultants. These sessions not only provided crucial updates but also unveiled innovative strategies for navigating the ever-changing benefits landscape. Presentations offered perspectives on cost-effective solutions and emerging trends participants can implement within their organizations.

Our employer panel featured insights from leading benefits professionals at Panera Bread, Purdue University and Designer Brands. All three took the opportunity to discuss their organization's approach to benefits and what makes them stand out

in a growing competitive landscape. The open discussion emphasized the need for ongoing updates to align benefits with changing employee needs and expectations and stressed the importance of ensuring employees have a thorough understanding of benefits and feel comfortable when asking for help.

“Approachable language is a must when it comes to writing and presenting your benefits. Make it easy for your employees to understand. We've [Designer Brands] found success in using humor and targeting employees through email and other forms of communication,” said Erin Penland, benefits manager at Designer Brands.

A dynamic panel of consultants representing a national pharmacy practice, a privately-owned advisory firm and a leading pharmacy and health care consulting firm shared their candid insight with an audience of both consultants and employee benefits representatives. The trio discussed rising drug prices, the effects of legislation on pharmacy benefit plans and of course debated if plans should cover GLP-1s. While there was no consensus amongst the group on GLP-1 coverage, the insight from industry-leading consultants was appreciated.

Among the sessions, two of the standout moments were the presentation of two annual awards. The Larry L. Morgan Service Award, presented since 1988, acknowledges individuals for outstanding support and contributions to Employers Health, aligning with its principles of high-quality, cost-effective care. This year's recipient was Diane Brake of Optum Rx, recognizing her pivotal role in growing the Employers Health and Optum Rx relationship.

“I was completely shocked and overwhelmed by this great and meaningful honor. I put my heart and soul into the Employers Health relationship every day and enjoy working with the team to continually improve our relationship and value for our clients,” exclaimed Brake.

The Excellence in Benefits Award recognized Maria Martin, director of total rewards, global benefits at Royal Caribbean Group, for her significant contributions to the industry and her organization. Martin has been with Royal Caribbean for over 25 years. Nominated by her peers and unanimously selected by an independent panel of human resources and benefits industry professionals, she has been instrumental in the organization's recognition as one of the Top 100 Healthiest Companies in the U.S. for several years, ranking 16th in 2023.



Excellence in Benefits recipient, Maria Martin of Royal Caribbean Group and Employers Health President and CEO, Chris Goff.

During the second day, attendees could participate in breakout sessions, selecting three of nine presentations. These sessions covered a wide range of topics, including the effects of depression on workplace productivity, leveraging digital care to reduce costs and implementing cost-effective cancer care benefits. Between sessions, attendees had the opportunity to interact with sponsors and vendors to gain insights into their products and services to see how they can enhance their benefit offerings.

The conference concluded with a highly anticipated general session focusing on one of the industry's most pressing topics: GLP-1s. Presented by Employers Health clinical advisors, Courtney Keefe and Ernesto Munoz, the session delved into the expanding class of GLP-1s and the utilization management strategies for diabetes and obesity. Keefe and Munoz discussed how GLP-1s work, coverage dynamics, current trends within Employers Health's book of business and provided a glimpse into the predicted growth trajectory of this class.

The inaugural two-day Employers Health Annual Benefits Forum was a resounding success, bringing together over 200 benefits professionals from across the nation for enlightening discussions and invaluable networking opportunities. The participation of employers, consultants, vendors and more **showcased our shared dedication to creating healthier workplaces and better access to pharmacy benefits for all.** The Employers Health team is excited to do it again next year. **We hope you'll join us at the Hilton Columbus Polaris on April 22 and 23, 2025.**

2024 Annual Benefits Forum Webinars

Missed this year's Annual Benefits Forum? You can still hear from more than 20 seasoned benefits professionals on various employee benefits topics. These sessions provide exclusive insights into benefits trends and cover value-based strategies that help plan sponsors design and deliver comprehensive yet affordable pharmacy benefits.

On-demand Webinars

Watch and share with your colleagues wherever, whenever.

The View from Washington: Legislative and Regulatory Outlook

What You Should Know About GLP-1s

An Employer's Guide to Health Care Price Transparency

Upcoming Webinars

Save the date and register for the following webinars.

May 16 The Effects of Biosimilars and the Inflation Reduction Act on Prescription Drug Plans

May 29 Musculoskeletal Claims: A Cost You Can Control

June 6 Innovators in Employee Benefits: An Employer Panel

June 11 Competitive and Cost-Effective Pharmacy Benefits: Perspectives from Leading Consultants

June 27 Medical Stop Loss & Risk Strategies for Catastrophic Claimants

July 9 Tackling the Cost Conundrum: Strategies for Effective Health Care Cost Management

July 17 Supporting Caregivers in the Workplace

Visit EMPLOYERSHEALTHCO.COM/EVENTS to access recorded sessions and register for more.