

Strategies, Stories and Solutions: 2025 Annual Forum Recap

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The Employers Health 2025 Annual Benefits Forum featured over 200 attendees, 30 speakers and 17 presentations. Plan sponsors, vendors and benefits professionals across the U.S. gathered in Columbus, Ohio eager to learn, network and recharge with industry-leading professionals. The event delivered a powerful mix of insight and inspiration, leaving participants with real-world strategies they could take home and put into action.

To keep the energy high, the two-day forum featured a dynamic lineup of general and breakout sessions and two lively panels. Presenters covered everything from expected topics like GLP-1s, legislative updates and cost trends, to the often overlooked — like combating workplace loneliness and streamlining benefit communications for all populations. The employer-and-consultant panels sparked open dialogue from the beginning, setting the stage for candid conversations among the larger group that continued throughout the event.

Two standout moments were the presentation of two annual awards. The Larry L. Morgan Service Award, presented annually 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 Jonathan Ijaz of Merck & Co., recognizing his immense contribution and dedication to the Employers Health and Merck relationship.

The Excellence in Benefits Award, presented since 2017, recognized Misi Holmberg, director, benefits at Panera Bread. Holmberg has been sharing her contagious energy and passion for benefits with the Panera Bread benefits team for over a decade. Nominated by her peers, she has been instrumental in breathing life into new, innovative benefits and initiatives across Panera Bread.

“Misi is a great asset to the Panera benefits team because of her heart. She has expertise and is very intelligent, but it all boils down to the heart that she brings to work every day,” exclaimed Courtney Higgins, vice president, total rewards and HR technology at Panera Bread. *“Her ability to connect with others is a huge part of who she is and makes her great at what she does.”*





Throughout the forum, one message was clear: there's no one-size-fits-all approach to benefits. Every organization — regardless of size, industry or location — faces unique challenges. Innovation and timely resources are key to staying up to date in an evolving landscape that won't be getting less complicated or costly any time soon. Attendees were reminded that asking questions and flexibility is critical to ensuring their benefits are competitive and low cost for plan members. Most don't enter the benefits industry planning to navigate the complexities of health care, but the decisions they make every day have a profound impact on the lives of hundreds or even thousands of people and, Employers Health is honored to provide a yearly event that can help make those decisions easier.

The participation of employers, consultants, vendors and more showcased our shared dedication to creating healthier workplaces and better access to pharmacy benefits for all. It proved once again that when you bring together passionate professionals, exciting conversations happen. The Employers Health team is already working to make the 2026 Annual Benefits Forum even better. We hope you'll join us at the Hilton Columbus Polaris on March 24 and 25, 2026.

