

A group life wellness benefit: Creating a win-win for employers and employees

In the search for value in employee benefits, employers welcome “win-win” solutions. Group life insurance policies that supplement the basic death benefit with useful features can do just that – if they are designed appropriately.

Moreover, with maturing labor forces at many organizations, employee appreciation of group life coverage – particularly with value-added features – is likely to be greater than in the past. “That’s the reason we have been building our portfolio of flexible, enhanced product services,” says John Burke, director of product development with Dearborn National.

“Brokers are telling us they are having more in-depth conversations with their clients about group life with enhanced features, far more than just doing simple cost comparisons on a spreadsheet,” he adds.

One focus of these conversations is “Beneficiary Resource Services,” which helps beneficiaries (and, indirectly, employers as well) beyond providing an immediate cash benefit.

Coping with sorrow and change

A basic goal of Beneficiary Resource Services is “to help beneficiaries cope with sorrow and change – an enormous challenge for most people following the death of a loved one,” notes Craig Nordyke, vice president and chief actuary at Dearborn National.

Employers, of course, empathize with employees undergoing the pain and disorientation that follows the death of a spouse. But they often also face the challenge of compensating for the loss of productivity as bereaved employees work their way through the grieving process – which, without adequate support, might last for many months.

Another practical challenge for supervisors and human resource managers upon the death of the spouse of an employee, as well as the death of an employee, is being ill-equipped to provide guidance upon receiving “the call” from the distressed and possibly overwhelmed survivor.

Beneficiary Resource Services can help employers meet these challenges. Such services available to Dearborn National group life policy beneficiaries include professional grief counseling, legal advice, financial counseling and online resources for funeral planning. “Some or all of these can be extremely valuable to the beneficiary both immediately following a death, and beyond,” Burke says. Beneficiaries can take advantage of these resources for a full year.

Equivalent to a wellness benefit

He compares the services to the wellness features that broaden the scope of basic health benefits, with their more holistic consideration of employee needs.

The grief counseling service, for example, provides telephone-based and face-to-face support from experienced master’s degree level clinicians. Telephone-based consultation is unlimited, and up to five (depending upon utilization of other services in the package) face-to-face consultations are covered, Burke explains.

Counselors, available 24/7, respond to initial calls, assess callers’ needs and coordinate the delivery of appropriate services.

“If the employer receives the initial call from a distressed employee or spouse and feels ill-equipped to handle the caller’s needs, at the appropriate time they can ‘warm transfer’ them to a professional counselor,” Burke adds.

Specialized attorneys, meanwhile, are available to beneficiaries for telephone-based or in-person consultation to help beneficiaries deal with the estate issues that arise in the wake of the death of a loved one.

“Having immediate free access to qualified attorneys is particularly helpful when beneficiaries have not already identified appropriate sources of legal assistance prior to the death,” according to Nordyke. “And when you consider that, according to our research, less than half of the workforce has a will, the value of this service is clear.”

Maximizing the death benefit

Financial counseling, also available under the beneficiary resource services menu, enables survivors to make the best use of their death benefit, as well as guide them on how to carry out routine financial responsibilities that may previously have been handled by the decedent. Only certified consumer credit counselors are retained for this service.

Finally, many beneficiaries “have not had to be involved in planning a funeral before,” Burke says. Those who have, will especially appreciate how the online funeral planning service simplifies the process and provides a means for planning prior to the death of a loved one. Grieving, not planning, should be the first priority. The Web-based resource provides planning checklists, local funeral cost estimates, listings of firms that provide funeral and related services, and information on different religious traditions around funerals.

Beneficiary resource services are just one component of a suite of enhanced product services offered in conjunction with Dearborn National’s group insurance products. Others include online will prepa-

ration, online beneficiary management services, and a travel service to assist group life policyholders address emergencies that occur while traveling.

“All of these can add value to group life insurance offering,” Burke says. “Employees are receptive to learning how group life can provide a lot more than a check in

the mail, and employers take note when they learn how these extras can address some of their own needs as well as those of their employees,” he adds.



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