Family Benefits:

Developing a Comprehensive Strategy to Improve Maternal & Infant Health Outcomes and Reduce Costs





The days are gone when competitive salaries alone could attract and retain top talent. Employees increasingly seek job satisfaction over wages. They want opportunities for growth, work-life balance, and benefits that help them start and nurture families. They understand that building a family is a major life change, and given the cost and uncertainties, they are looking for an employer who will support their journey.

Studies show that when companies focus on the well-being of their employees – through generous benefits and other perks – they enjoy improved job performance, employee motivation, and performance.[1]

For this reason, employers seek a new category of family-friendly benefits from their health plan partners that demonstrate their concern for the employee's well-being.

Amid the swirl of options, they may be unsure which benefits to offer and how to manage the costs associated with maternal and infant health. Benefits managers need support from the health plan to navigate this new terrain.

What are family-friendly benefits?

Family-friendly benefits support employees through all life stages – from starting a family to managing responsibilities.

A survey of U.S. employers found that 37% of respondents offered at least one specialized benefit or resource to support reproductive health. These include family planning, fertility, prenatal wellness, behavioral health, high-risk pregnancies, lactation, premature birth, postpartum health, behavioral health, and work-life balance.



37%

of U.S. employers offer at least one specialized benefit or resource to support reproductive health

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What do employees want?

Surveys show that most employers offer family benefits in some manner. These may include offering parental leave (64%), virtual care for pediatrics (44%), virtual care for pregnancy and postpartum (38%), or coaching resources (26%) that help parents return to work.[2]

Many plans offer app-based programs to cover maternity needs, but these programs usually focus on normal to medium-risk pregnancies. Apps alone can't manage high-risk pregnancies or premature births that end up in the NICU.

Part of the challenge is that employers are not offering a comprehensive maternity and NICU solution because they don't expect challenging pregnancies or NICU events. Health plans, though, must help employers prepare for these contingencies to control costs and mitigate risk.

A comprehensive Maternity and NICU Care Management solution should risk stratify and manage chronic conditions, manage high-cost births, and coordinate with the five areas of family building that employees seek.



These benefits include:[3]

1. **Fertility benefits** – 31% of employees want a fertility benefit even though only 10% of couples fail to conceive after two years of unprotected sex.[4] The infertility rate increases after age 30 when professional women often start a family. Despite the demand for fertility benefits, only 1-2 percent of U.S. births are via IVF.
2. **Adoption/surrogacy benefits** – Same-sex marriages and fertility issues have made adoption and surrogacy benefits sought by 27% of workers – and for a good reason. A traditional adoption might cost $30,000, while surrogacy could cost $150,000.
3. **Preconception care/family planning** – For people considering a family, pre-pregnancy care reduces morbidity and mortality for the mother and the baby, increases the chances of conception, and prevents unintended pregnancies.
4. **Caregiver leave** – Benefits supporting caregivers help the 53% of employee caregivers who struggle with absenteeism, productivity, morale, and turnover. Companies also lose institutional knowledge if a worker leaves a job to care for a loved one. Eighty-four million seniors are expected by 2050, and approximately 70% of those adults will require assistance from younger people at some point.[5]
5. **Virtual family care** – COVID introduced many workers to telehealth who discovered the time-saving benefits of a virtual PCP visit. With virtual care, members might see a nurse practitioner, physician, behavioral health specialist, or case manager. Unlike COVID telehealth, virtual family care is a fully online practice where patients use urgent care and lab services for in-person needs.

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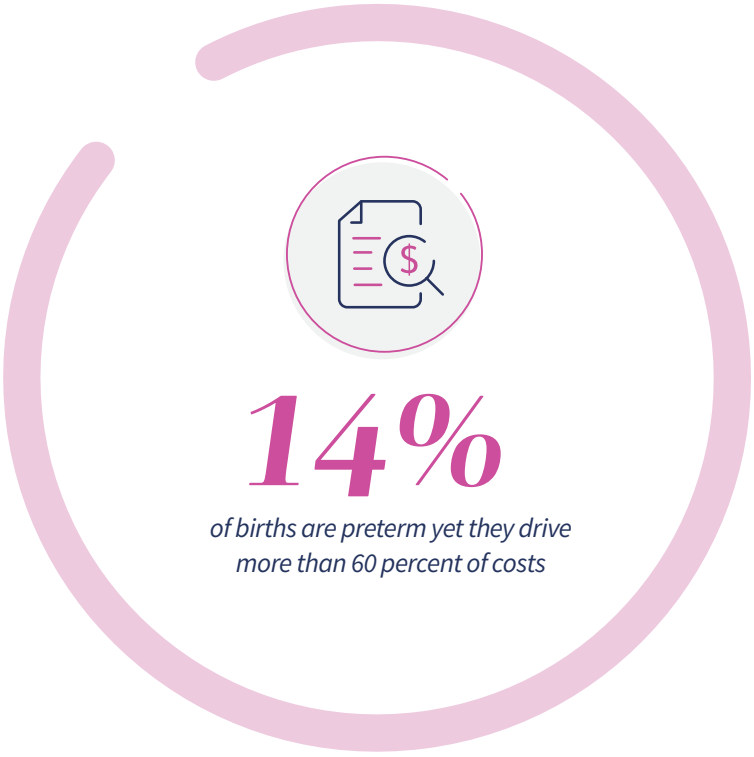
Do fertility benefits increase risk?

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) recently found that women who receive infertility treatments are more than twice as likely to deliver preterm. They also have a higher probability of delivering twins or triplets.

According to an NIH-funded study of fertility treatments, in vitro fertilization (IVF) drove the greatest risk for preterm birth, followed by intrauterine insemination and ovulation drugs. Multiple pregnancies (twins, triplets, etc.) that result from fertility treatments also increase preterm birth risk.[6]

Mitigating the risk and cost of preterm birth

Medical costs for newborns are some of the fastest growing in healthcare, driven mainly by infants requiring NICU services. Such cases represent a small percentage of the newborn population yet drive a disproportionate percentage of the total cost of care. ProgenyHealth's data shows that 14 percent of preterm births drive more than 60 percent of costs.



According to Sun Life, newborn and infant care is the fifth-leading cause of stop-loss claims for self-funded plans. Within the newborn and infant care category, 21.4 percent of total claims spend is due to short gestation, totaling $61.4 million from 2018 to 2021 on claims for preterm births.[7]

A growing crisis – The March of Dimes Report Card

Underscoring the crisis of preterm birth, the 2022 March of Dimes Report Card calculated a 10.5 percent preterm birth rate and gave the U.S. an overall grade of D+. In addition to the preterm rate, the Report Card looked at race and ethnicity disparity, infant mortality, maternal health, and more.[8]

D+
Preterm Birth Score

5.4%
Infant Mortality Rate

$25B
Annual societal economic cost associated with preterm birth

52%
Higher preterm birth rate among Black women

7,384
Babies are born preterm in an average week

4.7M
Women live in counties with limited maternity care access

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What's driving the cost of maternal care?

According to the Sun Life report, stop-loss claims for preterm and complex births average $318,000 per event.[9] Multiple pregnancies and compound health issues, including obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, and behavioral health issues drive these high-cost births.

Other factors driving preterm costs include avoidable admissions into the NICU, lengths of stay longer than clinically indicated, and higher acuity treatments than supported by clinical protocols.

Managing pregnancies with a comprehensive approach

A comprehensive maternity and NICU Care management solution manages the full spectrum of risk (from normal pregnancies to high-risk pregnancies), solves life challenges, reduces variations in care, empowers families, and drives quality outcomes at lower costs. A continuum of care delivers a predictable ROI by integrating:

- A digital experience combined with risk-stratified care plans for all pregnancies.
- NICU-focused care management to reduce costly inpatient stays, readmissions, and ER visits.
- Payment validation and assurance to ensure NICU claims accurately match care provided and payments are in alignment.

The need for postpartum care

The nation's maternal mortality rate is rising, and many of these deaths are preventable – particularly those associated with depression, overdose, and suicide.

According to the CDC, at one-year postpartum, suicide and substance use are the leading causes of maternal deaths, with suicide accounting for 9% of maternal mortality. Anxiety, perinatal and postpartum depression, and birth-related PTSD are the most common complications, affecting 1 in 5 women – yet 75% go untreated. Women of color are more likely to experience these conditions yet less likely to seek help.

Once the newborn comes home, postpartum care is essential to support the welfare of the mother and child.

Supporting employee retention

In the U.S., more than 75% of expectant mothers plan to return to work after giving birth,[10] but once the baby comes home, 43% of them end up leaving their careers.[11] Even if a new mom returns to work, there's a 50% likelihood that she will seek a new job to get family-friendly benefits – often at lower pay. Employees who fail to return from maternity leave cost an employer 20% to 213% of an employee's annual salary.[12]

43%

of new mothers leave their careers after childbirth

The Federal Family and Medical Leave Act only provides 12 weeks of unpaid leave for an employee caregiver. Employees demand more, including flexible scheduling, remote work, reduction to part-time, job sharing, and specialized caregiver services.[13]

Compare the federal minimum to the tech sector, where Google now offers 24 weeks of paid time off, Airbnb and Microsoft offer 22 weeks, and Amazon offers 20 weeks. Google's Fiona Cicconi told Business Insider the company wanted to "support our employees at every stage of their lives."



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Transitioning back to work

Generous leave policies don't automatically reduce stress or solve the social determinants of health that accompany full-term and premature births. Most women want to return to work, but they need stability at home and reliable care for their newborns before that can happen. Most maternity care policies fail to support the transition to parenthood. The newfound pressure of raising a child results in absenteeism (not going to work due to emotional stress), presenteeism (being physically present at work but not fully engaged or mentally present), or quitting the job altogether.



Implementing a risk mitigation strategy

Employers seek more than a menu of family benefits. They are looking to offer a comprehensive strategy supporting their employees' maternal health and family needs while protecting the bottom line. A comprehensive risk strategy should include:

- Pre-pregnancy education to enhance prenatal wellness and lessen prematurity risk.
- A whole-person maternal health program that improves the likelihood of full-term healthy pregnancies and unwarranted C-sections.
- Digital App to create custom birth plans and provide personal health insights and educational curriculums, track fertility, pregnancy progress, and health appointments, and connect with health coaches.
- NICU case management and utilization management programs to manage costs and drive quality outcomes in the event of a NICU admission.
- Healthcare advocacy to help families navigate the healthcare system and to locate the care and resources they need.
- Postpartum support for mother and baby with an emphasis on behavioral health.
- NICU Payment Validation & Assurance program to prevent inaccurate NICU claims submitted to the health plan or administrator.

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ProgenyHealth: A comprehensive maternal health benefit

ProgenyHealth delivers care management throughout the maternal health process to help mothers have healthier, happier pregnancies by supporting Maternity and NICU Care Management needs.

Our industry-leading expertise improves maternal and infant health for normal, moderate risk, and high-risk pregnancies, as well as for complex NICU births and postpartum issues, especially for at-risk members.

ProgenyHealth's maternal and infant continuum of care includes:

- **Comprehensive Maternal Health** – ProgenyHealth supports healthier pregnancies by implementing maternity levers aimed at decreasing the likelihood of C-sections and preterm births, support larger and healthier infants at delivery, and enhance member engagement with their pregnancy and infant's health. The program includes education, developing a plan of care, managing chronic conditions throughout the pregnancy, helping to manage doctor visits, and identifying and solving for life challenges.
- **Care Management** – ProgenyHealth Case Managers support the entire maternal health process to help mothers have healthier, full-term pregnancies, including for normal, moderate or rising risk, and high-risk pregnancies, as well as for complex NICU births and postpartum issues.
- **NICU Utilization Management** – ProgenyHealth uses data intelligence captured by its proprietary platform, Baby Trax® – based on millions of data points and evidence-based guidelines – to provide appropriate length of stay guidance. By managing an appropriate length of stay, monitoring levels of care, and verifying diagnostic codes, ProgenyHealth improves quality of care and optimizes cost savings for a health plan's fully-insured offering or for self-insured employers.
- **NICU Payment Validation & Assurance** – Our Payment Validation & Assurance program helps prevent inaccurate payments and maximizes value from our NICU UM services. We review claims against clinical authorizations, identify variances between approved days and levels of care, and confirm codes that may impact reimbursements.



Strategies to reduce costs

Claims data shows that 5% of plan members incur 60% of claims, mainly from undiagnosed conditions or mismanaged chronic disease care.[14] Routine preventative care and chronic disease management help improve employee health, which can lower the overall cost of claims. A comprehensive maternity program can improve maternal health outcomes and reduce the likelihood of premature and high-cost newborn events.

5%

of plan members incur 60% of claims. A maternity program can reduce the likelihood of a high-cost newborn event

ProgenyHealth starts by analyzing your utilization and claims data to help you better understand your maternal and infant health costs and provides solutions that can support lowering them.

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Next steps for health plans

- **Step one** is to talk to employers. Ask if their family benefits package meets the needs of their employees while providing adequate coverage for the company. Review claims data from NICU admissions and high-cost births. What kind of exposure do they have from premature births?
- **Step two** is to look at what programs your health plan is offering to employers. Can it serve as a recruiting/retention tool for employers? Is it competitive? Does it meet the needs of Millennials and Generation Z?

As a health plan, you have the tools to design benefits that attract and retain employer customers while mitigating the risk of catastrophic claims from premature births and other medically complex events.

Let us partner with you on family benefits design

ProgenyHealth partners with health plans and claims administrators to help safeguard self-funded plans from costly maternal and infant health issues and work with fully-insured offerings to get the right combination of benefits for your customers.

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ProgenyHealth – Providing for a lifetime of improved health and well-being for moms, babies, caregivers, and families

ProgenyHealth empowers our health plan and employer partners to change the trajectory of maternal and infant health outcomes across America. Informed by more than 20 years of experience and patient data, our end-to-end maternal and infant care management solution helps ensure the best possible outcomes for every expecting mother we touch. Our wholly integrated solution builds a network of support for an uninterrupted continuum of care from prenatal health, through any resultant NICU stay, and all the way to one full year of life.

From the very beginning, we unite early health risk assessment data with self-directed digital tools and dedicated Case Managers who work tirelessly to connect at-risk moms-to-be with the resources, care, and support they need for a healthy, full-term delivery. By promoting predictable, equitable, and standardized high quality care journeys, we ensure healthier outcomes—and lower costs—across your entire at-risk population. In so doing, we help overcome systemic barriers to support healthier pregnancies and healthier starts to life for all moms and babies, one family at a time.

Learn more from our experts. Call or email:

610-832-2001, press 5

Contact@progenyhealth.com

Resources:

1. https://hbr.org/2023/02/leading-with-compassion-has-research-backed-benefits
2. https://www.hrmorning.com/news/family-benefits-increase-loyalty/
3. https://www.hrmorning.com/news/family-benefits-increase-loyalty/
4. https://www.cofertility.com/family-learn/fertility-statistics
5. https://www.hcaoa.org/uploads/1/3/3/0/133041104/value_of_home_care___secured.pdf
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7. https://www.sunlife.com/us/en/about/insights-and-events/2022-sun-life-stop-loss-research-report/
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13. https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/legal-and-compliance/employment-law/pages/benefits-supporting-family-caregivers.aspx
14. https://www.usi.com/2022-employee-benefits-market-outlook/

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