

MANAGING YOUR MONEY

Understanding Employee Benefits

(NAPSA)—Traditionally, a company's open enrollment period is when workers decide which employee benefits to select for themselves and their families for the coming year.

This year, many Americans are concerned about the challenging economic climate, rising inflation and high fuel and food prices. There is also uncertainty about the future viability of some traditional corporate and social safety nets such as Social Security, Medicare and pension plans. As a result, more than three-quarters (77 percent) of Americans say they are planning to create their own personal safety nets to protect their family's financial future.

Since the workplace is where Americans get the majority of their protection products, deciding which benefits to select in a given year has become even more critical. As a result, employees are now taking a stronger interest in selecting their own benefits and want tools and information that make the decision-making process less complicated.

"As employees continue to bear more responsibility for choosing and paying for their benefits, they have a stronger interest in making smarter decisions than they did in years past," notes Bill Mullaney, president of MetLife's Institutional Business division. "Employees are, therefore, more engaged in the open enrollment process this year

Benefits Help

When deciding about benefits, workers want:

- More Information
- A Better Presentation of Materials
- Guidelines and Instructions by Life Stage
- New Benefits



and, consequently, they're looking for a different open enrollment experience."

According to MetLife's 2008 Open Enrollment survey, a quarter of employees felt confused or frustrated while selecting their benefits during last year's open enrollment. They're finding open enrollment materials more difficult to understand, and it's a challenge to relate the "one size fits all" information to their individual household needs.

First and foremost, workers want access to resources presented in an easy-to-understand format and tailored to their personal life stage, so they know which benefits make sense for them now.

Employees with enough resources to make informed decisions are almost three times as likely to feel confident in their benefits selection. Therefore, workers may want to ask their employers for the following:

More Information—Roughly one-quarter (23 percent) of em-

ployees say their HR department could make the open enrollment process easier by providing more information about the employee benefits offered. Currently, the most common types of communications for open enrollment are reminders of the enrollment deadline (50 percent) and the Big Envelope of benefits enrollment materials (49 percent).

Better Presentation of Materials—Employees can request seminars, online decision-support tools such as interactive calculators and one-on-one meetings with HR.

Guidelines and Instructions by Life Stage—Customized guidance lets employees see the important benefits considerations that coincide with significant life events such as changing jobs, buying a home or having a baby.

New Benefits Offerings—Nearly all workers (94 percent) feel that it is important for employers to offer benefits even if employees must pay for most or all of the cost. This gives employees more options and thus more of an opportunity to further customize their open enrollment decisions. Dental insurance, vision insurance and prescription drug benefits are among the most desired new benefits offerings.

Improving the overall open enrollment experience can be a win-win for employers and employees.