



CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE ENDORSE NEW HEALTH PLAN TO HELP SMALL BUSINESSES COPE WITH THE HIGH COST OF HEALTH CARE

New Chamber Health Plan Saves Member Businesses 25%-40% In Health Care Costs; Improves Benefits For Employees

California chambers of commerce are increasingly taking a leadership role to help small businesses cope with rising health care costs and improve access to quality care for their employees, according to BEN-E-LECT, a leading third party administrator (TPA) and innovator of Employer Driven Health Plans.™

"We've seen a rise in interest from chamber executives, particularly those who are taking a more active role as advocates for the small business members they represent," says Mark Reynolds, president and CEO of BEN-E-LECT. "Just this month, five new chambers have joined our Chamber Affinity Program and are now introducing their members to our benefits plan that has proven to be successful and is being used by more than 2,000 businesses throughout California."

Among the chambers that have most recently partnered with BEN-E-LECT are the Stockton, Chino Valley, Santa Barbara, Irvine, and Escondido Chambers of Commerce, representing approximately 6,500 businesses.

"The high cost of health insurance is one complaint we often hear from our members, the majority who own small businesses and can't afford insurance but would like to offer it to their

employees," explains Andy Ronquillo, executive director of the Chino Valley Chamber of Commerce. "Smaller businesses are constantly getting hit and need additional help. We want to help ease that high cost of doing business by introducing a health plan that can save them a significant amount of money each year."

According to a 12-month study of the company's 2,000 employer groups statewide, businesses using BEN-E-LECT's Employer Driven Health Plan™ model saved an average of \$1,775 per employee unit last year. Ronquillo hopes his

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members will benefit by similar savings. He says three members have already signed up and are installing a

new health plan with BEN-E-LECT.

Escondido Chamber CEO Harvey Mitchell moved his staff of five to one of BEN-E-LECT's high deductible plans three years ago and has saved \$40,000 in health care costs during that period of time. Mitchell explains they moved from a traditional PPO plan with no deductible to a high deductible (\$2,000) plan with BEN-E-LECT. Drawing from the 'pool of money' it saves in premiums each year, the chamber pays 100 percent of any claims under the \$2,000 deductible. The staff continues to receive the same level of benefits. However, the chamber

stops wasting insurance premium for benefits that the majority of employees never use and only spends money when an employee actually incurs a claim, according to Mitchell.

After three years on the plan and realizing significant benefits for the chamber, Mitchell decided to now introduce the plan to the chamber's 850 members and strongly believes it will have far-reaching benefits for the community.

"We're concerned about Universal Health Care and believe this is a great alternative to a state run program," explains Mitchell who says public officials including Assemblyman Martin Garrick are interested in learning more about the plan. "We believe it's important that small businesses are able to provide insurance to their employees since it will give more people access to quality care and alleviate the strain on our health care system created by the uninsured."

"With an alarmingly high number of uninsured people in our state and many businesses faced with cutting benefits to remain profitable, chambers of commerce can offer a cost-effective solution that can help businesses upgrade their benefits package or extend benefits to more of their employees," adds Bob Amorde, BEN-E-LECT's Director of Affinity Programs.

"The Santa Barbara Chamber is always looking for opportunities to better service its 2,000 business members," says Steve Cushman, Executive Director of the Santa Barbara Chamber of Commerce. "The BEN-E-LECT Chamber Affinity program provides a unique opportunity for businesses to offer their employees excellent services and exceptionally competitive pricing in health insurance."

While any employer group in California, Colorado, Nevada, Arizona, Utah, and Idaho can

obtain a BEN-E-LECT health plan through a licensed agent or broker, Chamber members receive additional advantages through their membership including improved plan benefits and discounted fees, explains Amorde.

Amorde believes the BEN-E-LECT Chamber Affinity Program will provide chambers of commerce a key component to add to the cadre of membership benefits they offer. He also expects a high level of interest among chamber brokers and agents who are looking to distinguish themselves in the health care market and reduce clients' plan costs.

The Escondido Chamber is looking forward to getting its member agents involved. "We're making a special effort for our member agents to come in, learn about the BEN-E-LECT Chamber Health Plan, and take the lead in marketing the program to our members," adds Mitchell. "Their involvement is something we are very excited about."

BEN-E-LECT's Chamber Affinity Program is built on the success of its pilot program with the Fresno Chamber of Commerce, which was established more than four years ago and continues to be supported by its members.

About BEN-E-LECT

BEN-E-LECT is one of country's leading third party administrators (TPAs) and an innovator of "employer driven" medical, dental, and vision plans for small to medium size groups. The company combines high deductible plans with its plan administration and claims services to offer employers savings in healthcare premiums while maintaining or improving their level of benefits. Established in 1987, BEN-E-LECT currently serves more than 2,000 small business groups in California and Colorado, totaling approximately 70,000 covered lives.