

In line with Spring weather changes, you may be experiencing changes in the corporate environment from preparing for new hires to working through your current and future health insurance needs. TCG is available to address your PPACA Compliance issues, Wellness and prescription drug concerns, and more.

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PPACA...What's Next?

To say that 2013 was a bumpy road for the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) would be an understatement. We saw major glitches with the Healthcare.gov website, state websites, rising premiums and terminated policies.

Although 2013 was not a great year, PPACA will continue headway in 2014. This will be a pivotal year with much of the law's major provisions going into effect. More delays or problems are expected in the coming months due to technical issues.

Human Resource managers and employees are seeking guidance and advice to help them get into compliance with the new laws.

Here are just a few things concerning PPACA coming up in 2014:

1. The Individual Mandate
2. Market Reforms
3. Tax Credits Begin

More details to come.....



Marketplace Open Enrollment Deadline Extended

The Obama administration has long said that consumers must enroll in a health insurance plan by March 31 or face financial consequences. The Washington Post reported that federal officials had granted applicants a little more breathing room. People who have begun to apply for coverage on the healthcare.gov federal marketplace site, but do not finish on time, will have until about mid-April to ask for an extension.

The mandate to buy insurance remains politically controversial. Some Republican members of Congress have argued that it has too many exceptions to be effective, including 14 hardship exemptions such as having a recent death in the family, being a victim of domestic abuse, being unable to pay medical expenses in the past 24 months or having a policy canceled and considering the available options unaffordable.

This month House Republicans voted to delay the so-called individual mandate by five years, though such legislation wouldn't survive the Democrat-controlled Senate or Obama's promised veto.

Source: The Chicago Tribune

**"Let every man be respected as an individual and no man idolized."
- Albert Einstein**

Advocating ACA To Key Demographics And The Uninsured Rate Drops

President Obama will "aim to reach America's moms, who typically drive health care decisions for their families," in order to "leverage that mom voice to spread the word about the health law and the limited time remaining to enroll."

President Obama is also set to "champion his health care law on WebMD." Obama plans to "discuss the importance of signing up for health insurance" as the end of open enrollment on March 31 approaches.

A recent poll revealed the lowest rate of uninsurance in the country since before President Obama took office. Weeks before the ACA's enrollment deadline, "15.9% of U.S. adults are uninsured thus far in 2014, down from 17.1% for the last three months of 2013." That's about 3 million people gaining coverage. The uninsurance rate is predicted to "continue to fall" as additional provisions of the ACA kick in.

Final Employer Shared Responsibility Rules

On February 10th, the Treasury Department released the final rules on compliance with the employer shared responsibility requirements, taking place January 1, 2015. The regulations apply to employers that had 50 or more full time employees or full time equivalent employees in the prior year. Some notable provisions are outlined below.

The final rules phase in the employer requirements for smaller employers, giving employers with less than 100 full time equivalent employees but more than 50 until January 1, 2016 to comply with the employer requirements.

To be eligible, an employer will have to go through a certification process to demonstrate that, during the period beginning on February 9, 2014 and ending on December 31, 2014, the employer does not reduce the size of its workforce or the overall hours of service of its employees in order to satisfy the workforce size condition.

The regulations provide that employers will not be subject to tax penalties for not offering coverage in 2015 if they offer coverage to at least 70% of their full time employees.

This means the employer will not be subject to the \$2,000-per-employee "no coverage" penalty if it offers coverage to 70% or more of eligible employees in 2015. This is a change from the proposed rule, under which employers would have had to offer coverage to at least 95% of their full time employees right away. All eligible employers will need to offer coverage to 95% of eligible employees and their dependents in 2016 to avoid potential tax penalties. In 2015, under the 70% standard and, in later years, under the 95% standard, the employer may still be subject to the "b" penalty of \$3,000 per individual employee if an otherwise eligible employee who was not offered coverage does seek and obtain

subsidized coverage through a health insurance exchange.

There will be a one-year transition relief period for employers who contribute to multi-employer plans. The final rule says that, should the current requirements ever change, the change will be applied prospectively, so that employers will always have the chance to come into compliance before being penalized. The existing guidance on multi-employer plans provides that if an employer contributes to a multi-employer plan on behalf of employees (such as union employees) and the multi-employer plan meets the affordability and minimum value coverage criteria, the employer's obligation to offer coverage to these employees will be considered met.



Medicare Part D Creditable Coverage Notification Due Date

Medicare Part D is a voluntary prescription drug benefit, but individuals who are not enrolled may be required to pay a penalty. Individuals can delay enrollment and the fee if they are enrolled in a creditable prescription drug plan that is comparable to Part D. Therefore, group health plan sponsors that provide prescription drug coverage to individuals eligible for Medicare Part D must disclose to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) whether that coverage is creditable or non-creditable.

The annual CMS notice must be given online, at the CMS website (<https://www.cms.gov/Medicare/Prescription-Drug-Coverage/CreditableCoverage/CCDisclosureForm.html>), within:

- (1) 60 days after the first day of the plan year; or
- (2) 30 days after the termination of a prescription drug plan, and/or 30 days after any change in the creditable coverage status of a prescription drug plan.

When completing the certification, have the following available:

- (1) # of Rx options offered to Medicare-eligible individuals;
- (2) # of benefit options offered that are considered creditable coverage;
- (3) # of benefit options that are considered non-creditable;
- (4) # of Part D-eligible individuals expected to have coverage under the plan at the start of the plan year, including active employees, retirees, disabled individuals and any of their Part D-eligible dependents, and any individuals on COBRA who are Part D-eligible.
- (5) The most recent calendar date on which the required notices of creditable or non-creditable coverage were provided.

In addition to notifying CMS, plan sponsors must also notify Medicare Part D eligible individuals of the status of their prescription drug coverage at a minimum as follows:

- Prior to the individual's initial period of entitlement for Medicare Part D.
- Prior to the effective date of the individual's enrollment in the employer's prescription drug plan.
- Upon any change in the employer's prescription drug coverage as creditable or non-creditable.
- Annually, on or before, October 15 of each year.
- Upon an individual's request.

Mental Health Services Access Increasing



Access to mental health services is increasing in 2014 largely due to steps being taken by the current Administration.

First, President Obama signed a bill which secures \$115 million to be used to train more mental health professions as well as helping adults who work with youth recognize early signs of mental health problems. These funds will also be put to good use with a new initiative to support state-based programs

for 16-25 year olds who are at high risk for mental illness.

Additionally, \$50 million has been made available to establish and expand services for individuals living with mental and behavioral illnesses. The funds will make it possible for centers to hire new professionals and substance use disorder services.

Finally, with the implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), essential health benefits, including mental health, are now covered requirements under the essential health benefits portion of ACA. This, along with the elimination of pre-existing condition clauses, individuals suffering from mental health or substance addictions will be able to have much more access to professional treatments.

Some Non-Citizens In The US Qualify For ACA Subsidies.

It's been reported that "a little-noticed provision" of the ACA "allows some low-income immigrants who live here legally to qualify for subsidies to help them buy private insurance" even though "poor U.S. citizens are not eligible for those subsidies because the law provided for an expansion of Medicaid to help them get coverage." It's added that in Florida, "a state with a large foreign-born population, the immigration issue injects a political wild card into a debate that has largely centered on ideological differences."



Tips For Successful Weight Loss

Whenever you have a desire to achieve a certain goal, whether it is to go after that promotion or change careers, to improve a certain skill, or to travel somewhere that appeals to your interests, you have to define clearly the steps that you will take to make it happen for you. The same is true when setting a goal for weight loss.

To decide simply that you want or need to lose weight is not enough. You need to figure out why you want to reach a goal and map out exactly how you're going to do it. Make clearly defined steps that are achievable and set you up for success in your goal. Aim for reasonable, manageable, and measurable results that can be held accountable in your goal-setting. You can't just declare, "I need to lose 20 pounds" and then have no plan on how you're going to achieve that goal. That will just set you up to feel like a failure if you don't lose those 20 pounds.

Instead, make well-thought out plans like losing 1-2 pounds a week by: eating smaller portions; adding more fruits, vegetables and whole grains to your

daily intake; eating a breakfast with at least 5 grams of fiber to help you eat less food throughout the day; drinking at least 8 glasses of water a day; limiting fried foods and sugar consumption; walking for 30 minutes every day; and keeping a food journal to be more conscious of your food habits. If you set out to lose 1-2 pounds a week and you take small steps like the ones listed above to do so, then you have the distinct possibility of reaching your goal of losing 20 pounds in as little as 10 weeks (2½ months) or in 5 months if you want to allow yourself more time to reach your destination.

Find the internal and external reasons to reach and maintain your goal. Internal reasons aid in your long-term success much more significantly than external reasons. Some examples of internal reasons to lose weight are to feel better, to have more energy and drive, and to be healthier. An external reason is to fit into new clothes for a specific event. You're more likely to stay at your healthy weight because of the internal rewards that you get rather than the external rewards.

Find a support system. Working out with a buddy or being part of a support group gives you someone else to be accountable to rather than just yourself. For instance, some days you may feel like skipping your daily walk, but if you have a walking buddy then you're more likely to stay committed so that you don't let your buddy down. Your support system is there to remind you of your goals. Having a motivated friend help to push you to achieve your goals can definitely contribute to your success more than if you try to go it alone.

When you meet your goal, then your work begins on maintaining your new healthy lifestyle changes. Hopefully, by the time you reach your desired weight, you've truly begun to enjoy your new positive habits and can't see yourself ever falling back into any old unhealthy habits. Then it's time to set new goals and discover what else you can achieve once you put your mind to it!

Meet the "Copper" Plan

Democratic Senators from several states are pushing a package of 10 proposals that they believe will introduce more competition to the ACA's Marketplaces, and ease the burden on small businesses.

The centerpiece is a proposal for a "Copper" plan (50% coinsurance), intended to cut the cost of monthly premiums by shifting more of the cost of health care to individuals than do other standard ACA policies.

Source: MedCityNews

Minimum Wage Increase For Federal Contract Employees

President Obama announced that in the next few weeks, he will sign an executive order raising the minimum wage for workers covered by new federal contracts to \$10.10 an hour. This increase will be very limited in scope; it will only apply to employees who would otherwise make less than \$10.10 an hour and who are employed under new, rather than existing, federal contracts. The earliest this order is likely to take effect is in 2015. As of now, it appears that the general federal minimum wage of \$7.25, which must be amended by Congress (as opposed to by a presidential executive order), is unlikely to change in the near future.



Good Worker, Poor Attitude: Boosting Employee Morale

The best approach to boosting employee motivation is to look at factors that research has shown most closely align with employee satisfaction:

1) Relationship with employee's manager - This factor is often ranked higher than compensation and benefits.

2) Salary - You may need to evaluate some salary survey data to determine whether your organization's compensation is aligned with the market rate for comparable positions.

3) Benefit Plans - Not only health

and retirement plans, but also paid vacation, holidays, sick leave, etc.

4) Opportunity to use his/her skills and aptitudes -

Employees who feel like they are able to apply and exhibit their strengths and areas of talent tend to be much happier at work.

5) Sense of feeling valued - There are so many ways to express to employees that they are valued:

- Hand-written thank you letters

- Gift cards to local restaurants, theaters, etc.
- Bring in lunch or dinner
- Management car wash
- Massage therapist to give employees chair massages
- Team building events (bowling, dinner out, etc.)
- Casual dress day.

6) Opportunity for advancement

- Employees who see a clear path for growth within the company are happier and produce a higher quantity and quality of work.

401(k) Loans – A Good Idea?

American households have felt such a heavy blow due to the recession, a large amount of workers have dipped into their retirement savings to cover expenses like mortgages, tuition fees and emergency expenses.

Be wary of using your retirement account for these expenses since you just might be hurting yourself in the future.

Although a 401(k) loan is generally considered "borrowing from yourself", there are several pitfalls you should consider before applying for the loan.

1. If you must dip into your 401(k) Plan, try not to stop normal deferral contributions. This has a tendency to derail your account balance going forward and a lot of employees just never begin contributing again after stopping.
2. Fees are also another consideration. Employers generally charge a loan setup fee as well as an annual fee for administering and tracking outstanding loans.
3. Taxation is also a concern for which you should consider. Although you are paying back the loan to yourself, with interest, the loan payments are deducted on an after-tax basis. So your loan repayment is taxed and added to your account balance which then again gets taxed when a distribution is processed at retirement.

The bottom line is leave your retirement account for retirement and look for other ways to meet your financial needs in the present.

We hope that you find the information presented helpful, and we welcome any feedback.

Please feel free to visit our website at www.tikiaconsultinggroup.com and provide us with comments.

Thank you!