blue of california

Employer Connection Plus (EC+)
Benefits management tool enhancements 2018

Frequently Asked Questions

Background

Employee benefits management is one of several tools available to small business employers and brokers on Employer Connection Plus (EC+). We are changing vendors that provide the employee benefits management system.

We introduced this new tool in 2017 with 1,500 groups. There have been further enhancements since this introduction with more "releases" happening throughout the year. July 2018, we will begin moving all small businesses to use this tool. The last groups will transition in February 2019, with continued communications through the end of open enrollments that year.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is changing?

We are making upgrades to EC+ to simplify and streamline renewal and benefit administration processes, creating a more user-friendly experience, including improved site functionality on both desktop and mobile devices.

Some features and functionality used for managing employees' benefits will be different from the current experience using EC+. However, access to managing your groups – the site and login information – remains the same.

New	Not new
The design and functionality of EC+ after logging in and selecting a group.	How to log in and access your groups (same site, login, password).
The processes to manage benefits such as adding a dependent or changing a subscriber's plan selection.	Capabilities. You will still be able to manage benefits such as adding a dependent or changing a subscriber's plan selection.
Advanced reporting capabilities.	Self-service census reports.
Optimized for mobile devices.	View transaction history.

Who will use this?

The new member benefits management tool can be accessed by both group administrators and brokers. EC+ login and access will not change.

All Blue Shield small businesses will eventually use the new tool. There is no opt out, or option to continue using the current EC+ benefits management tool.

SHOP groups will not use this tool for benefits management.

Why is this changing?

The current benefits management tool within EC+ will be retired in 2019 and continuing to use the system on which it is built is not an option for us.

The new tool we've selected to replace the retiring system uses a product from industry leader Benefitfocus and has been chosen because it provides secure, reliable, and user-friendly features. Blue Shield and Benefitfocus have worked together, with feedback from brokers and employers, to customize the product and meet the specific needs of our small business groups.

The new tool is designed to allow continued updates, enhancements, and capabilities to meet the evolving needs of our small business groups and brokers.

When will this occur?
We considered the sales and renewals cycles during the year and the impact this transition will have on our groups and their brokers. To avoid transitioning groups at times when benefits management transactions are highest, migration will occur in waves based on renewal dates:

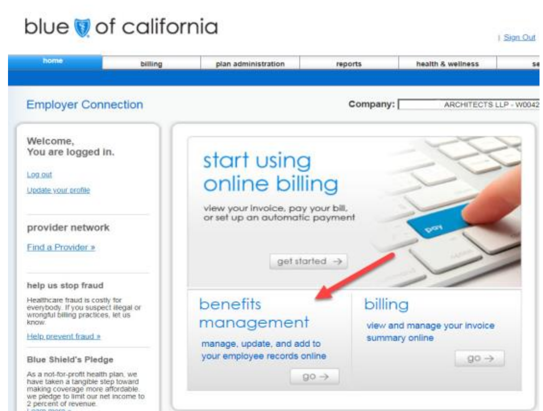
- **January to June groups** will start accessing the new tool at the end of July.
- **July and August groups** will start accessing the new tool in September.
- **September to December groups** will start accessing the new tool in February 2019.

This schedule is intended for groups and brokers to become familiar with the new features outside of open enrollment periods.
A small number of groups were introduced to the tool last year. With their feedback, and that of their brokers, we have continued to adapt the new tool to best serve our small business customers. There will be some exceptions to the above schedule, such as groups missing a tax ID number.

How and where can employers and brokers access this?
EC+ login and passwords do not change.
(for Brokers) From the EC+ home page, search for and select a group to manage benefits.

If the group selected is still using the old EC+ tools, the screen will have a "roster" section.

Using the new EC+ tools, the screen will have a "benefits management" section.



After clicking in the "benefits management" box, brokers will have to select the group again on the next screen. This additional step is a temporary requirement while both benefits management tools are still in use.

How and when are groups and brokers informed of the changes?
Groups and their brokers will begin receiving email communications six weeks prior to the scheduled migration (July, September, or February). There will be three communications before the transition, and three after, informing groups and brokers of the change and the resources available to learn the new tool.

What can the tool do?
With the new tool, users can complete many of the benefits management processes always done through EC+, with some enhancements:

- Enter new hires, process open enrollment, and manage qualifying event changes.
- Terminate coverage for employees and dependents.
- Change and update employee and dependent demographic information.
- Change employee class or subgroup.
- Generate reports including Employee Detail, Employee Census, Dependent Census, Transaction History, and many more.

Some enrollments or transactions cannot be completed through the current or new EC+ benefits management tool:

- Enrolling part-time employees
- Enrolling employees who are younger than 16 years of age or 70 years and older
- Enrollments outside 90-day retroactive period
- Cal-COBRA
- Urgent access-to-care requests
- Enrolling eligible court-ordered dependents when employee is not enrolled
- Off-cycle specialty benefits adds/buy-up
- Away from home care for HMO members

Is there training for the new tool and features?

With any new digital tool, some learning is required. There are multiple ways to learn how take advantage of the enhanced capabilities EC+ offers.

- Register for an online guided tour
- Access how-to videos: Brokers / Employers
- Review a recorded webinar session
- Download Administrators Guide

The following are answers to specific questions asked by brokers during the pilot:

Is there a confirmation that prints out when any changes/enrollments/terms have been completed?

Admins and brokers can use the employee-specific reports for confirmation for specific employees and use the broader reporting functionality to view confirmations across the total group.

How can ID cards be ordered since we can do this with current system?

ID cards must be ordered through the Member Portal.

If you have already entered a member and then the member wants the PPO instead of HMO, can you "edit" the plan choice after it's completed?

Edits can be made throughout the Open Enrollment and Initial Enrollment periods. Outside of these windows, a qualifying event will be needed to make the change.

Do we need to send in the paper-signed waivers?

No. Enroll members into the Portal but select "Waive Benefits."

How can we enroll members who never provided a waiver form, but are enrolling with a QE mid-year?

Enroll and select the appropriate qualifying event.

Has anything changed regarding COBRA notification when an employee terminates their employment? For example, we are still filling out an ER Notification of QE under Cal-COBRA.

There is no change from the current process.

Is the HR role fully replacing Employer Connection?

It's only replacing Employee Maintenance. The billing portion remains the same in Employer Connection.

What browsers will this be compatible with? Connectivity has been an issue with the current tool.

Benefits management through EC+ should function on all browsers.
Here is the link for specific browser compatibility:
https://www.benefitfocus.com/support/browsers

The following are resolutions to system access issues that users have experienced:

- Earlier versions of Firefox will not load correctly. If images are not displaying, use a different web browser or update Firefox to current version.
- Web browser settings, such as pop-up blockers, may prevent some options from functioning.

Still have questions?
For help navigating the new features or technical issues, call:
(855) 589-7970 (Monday to Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.)

For eligibility and benefits questions, or difficulties logging in to EC+, call:
Brokers: (800) 559-5905 (Monday to Thursday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.)
Employers: (800) 325-5166 (Monday to Thursday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.)

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