

PlanTalk

VOLUME 10

SPRING 2004

Basic and Enhanced Group Healthcare

Rate Changes Effective June 1, 2004

To offset the increased cost of claims paid in 2003, the HEPP Board of Trustees has approved rate increases for group healthcare premiums. Effective June 1, 2004, premiums for basic group healthcare will increase by 2%, and premiums for enhanced group healthcare will increase by 4%.

As premiums for group healthcare coverage are generally collected in the month prior, this change will be applied to payroll deductions in May for many plan members.

Monthly Premium Increases for the Basic Group Healthcare Plan: 2%

	BEFORE INCREASE	EFFECTIVE JUNE 1, 2004	BEFORE INCREASE WITH BLUENET POS DRUG CARD	EFFECTIVE JUNE 1, 2004 WITH BLUENET POS DRUG CARD	TOTAL INCREASE
Single Coverage	\$9.44	\$9.63	\$11.44	\$11.63	\$0.19
Family Coverage	\$22.54	\$22.99	\$24.54	\$24.99	\$0.45

Monthly Premium Increases for the Enhanced Group Healthcare Plan: 4%

	BEFORE INCREASE	EFFECTIVE JUNE 1, 2004	BEFORE INCREASE WITH BLUENET POS DRUG CARD	EFFECTIVE JUNE 1, 2004 WITH BLUENET POS DRUG CARD	TOTAL INCREASE
Single Coverage	\$25.47	\$26.49	\$27.47	\$28.49	\$1.02
Family Coverage	\$64.79	\$67.38	\$66.79	\$69.38	\$2.59

Dental Plan

Rate Changes Effective June 1, 2004

The HEPP Board of Trustees has approved an 8% rate increase for dental premiums, effective June 1, 2004.

This rate change is required to offset fee increases outlined in the Manitoba Dental Association's 2004 dental fee guide, help reduce the dental plan's deficit, and offset an increase in utilization.

As premiums for dental coverage are generally collected in the month prior, this change will be applied to payroll deductions in May for many plan members.

Monthly Premium Increases for the Dental Plan: 8%

	BEFORE INCREASE	EFFECTIVE JUNE 1, 2004	TOTAL INCREASE	IF SHARED 50/50 BETWEEN MEMBER & EMPLOYER
Single Coverage	\$23.54	\$25.42	\$1.88	\$0.94
Family Coverage	\$68.76	\$74.26	\$5.50	\$2.75

PlanTalk, a newsletter for employees and retirees participating in the Healthcare Employees Pension and Benefits Plans, is published by HEPP/HEBP Manitoba. Please note, not all employers participate in all HEPP/HEBP plans. Please contact your employer to find out which plans apply to you.

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Welcome!

Since the last issue of PlanTalk released in the spring of 2003, Clinic Community Health Centre, Nor'west Co-op Community Health Centre, and Arborg & District Seniors Resource Council have joined HEPP/HEBP and are participating in one or more plans.

The continuing expansion of participating facilities means increased portability of pension and benefits for HEPP/HEBP members throughout Manitoba.

The Inside Story

On Benefits

2003 Group Healthcare Plan Changes Update

The spring 2003 issue of PlanTalk notified the 21,000 members of the HEBP Basic and Enhanced Group Healthcare Plans that premium increases and benefit changes would occur effective June 1, 2003.

Since then, the HEBP Board of Trustees has received individual feedback and petitions from almost 1,800 concerned Plan members. Although these members, particularly those in the Enhanced Plan, feel the premium increase is significant, most would have preferred to pay even more, rather than have their paramedical benefit maximums reduced.

Members of the Enhanced Plan are also concerned that, once enrolled, they cannot subsequently change to Basic coverage, or withdraw from the Plan altogether.

The Trustees' primary responsibility is to ensure the Plans remain viable, however they wish to acknowledge the concerns expressed by Plan members. The feedback received will be taken into consideration when completing the next strategic plan review.

New ID Cards for Group Healthcare & Dental

Manitoba Blue Cross, the plan carrier of the HEBP Group Healthcare and Dental Plans has issued new identification cards to eligible plan members.

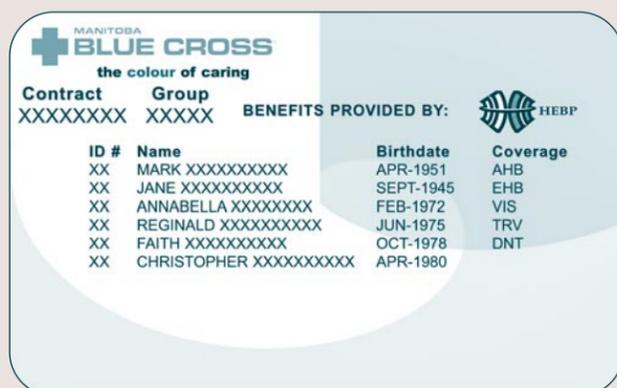
To comply with privacy legislation, identification cards no longer contain social insurance numbers. Instead, they contain 9-character identification numbers.

The cards feature more detailed information about individual coverage as well as the issue date, contact information for Blue Cross, and phone numbers for international travel assistance and the Employee Assistance Centre.

An explanation of benefits coverage accompanies the cards.

Any questions regarding identification cards can be directed to:

Email: info@mb.bluecross.ca
Interactive Voice Messaging: 783-8482 or toll-free at 1-888-461-2149
Telephone: 775-0151 or toll-free at 1-800-873-2583



Annual General Meeting Notice

This year, we will host a joint HEPP and HEBP Annual General Meeting. The event is scheduled for:

Monday, June 21 at 1:00 p.m.
in the Lombard Room of the Fairmont Hotel, at 2 Lombard Place, Winnipeg MB

RSVP by contacting Sandra McKinnon at:
942-6598 ext. 219 (in Winnipeg)
or toll-free: 1-888-842-4233
e-mail: mckins@hepp.mb.ca

2004 Ad Hoc COLA Not Viable for HEPP

At the end of each year, the HEPP Board of Trustees reviews the pension plan's estimated financial position and determines whether sufficient funds are available to grant an ad hoc cost of living adjustment (COLA), effective January 1 for the coming year.

Unfortunately, the HEPP Board of Trustees determined that the plan's financial position as of December 31, 2003, did not allow for a COLA to be granted effective January 1, 2004.

For further information, please contact HEPP at (204) 942-6591 or toll-free at 1-888-842-4233.

The Inside Story

On Benefits



Focus On Your Health & Wellness

Accessible Gardening

provided by Richard Broadhurst of the HEBP Disability and Rehabilitation Plan

With temperatures improving, our thoughts turn to spring and summer activities. Gardening is a rewarding leisure activity that can be enjoyed by people of all ages, including persons with physical limitations. Here are some simple tips that can help to ensure your gardening experience is a healthy and enjoyable one.

Just like when you exercise, you need to **warm up your joints** before you begin gardening. Light range of motion exercises should be sufficient unless you are recovering from a muscle injury.

When you are in the garden, make sure you **change positions frequently** to avoid stiffness. Alternate between sitting, standing, squatting, and kneeling. You can also use this philosophy to avoid repetitive strain injuries, for example alternate finger intensive activities with less demanding hand tasks. Use a kneeling pad in the garden to protect your knees, or a low stool to alternate between sitting and kneeling. Don't wait until you feel pain, be proactive and use a stopwatch to make sure you are changing positions frequently.

Pace yourself. Give yourself more time than you normally would to complete a task and take breaks throughout. Micro-breaks of 10-15 seconds should be taken every 5 minutes during most activities. Longer, less frequent breaks are required for large muscle and cardiovascular intensive tasks such as shoveling and lifting.

Work smarter by pushing more and pulling less. Use a trolley, don't lift and carry.

Use lightweight **ergonomic tools** with handles that are large, soft, and easy to grip. Instead of buying new tools, you can use hockey tape, rubber bicycle grips, or pieces of foam to create built-up handles on your favorite tools. You can also create a custom grip by heating a piece of PVC pipe in the oven at 235 F and molding it onto the handle to the desired shape (Careful, it's Hot!). Gloves with sticky surfaces also help to improve your grip on the tools. Remember to keep your tools sharp and in good shape, a sharp tool requires less energy to use. Splints, supports, and assistive devices can be used when gardening, but you should consult your physician or therapist first.

Use **proper body mechanics** whenever you are lifting. Lift with your knees not your back. Keep your feet wide apart when lifting a heavier load and wear supportive shoes with non-slip soles. Maintain the normal curve of your spine at all times and do not jerk when you lift. If something is too heavy ask someone to help you.

Figure out **creative ways to transport your tools** and equipment. Use an old golf bag with wheels to carry long handled tools. Use a sled, wagon, or wheelbarrow to pull tools and fertilizer. Make sure all handles and straps on carrying cases are thick and comfortable, or else the handles may "bite" and cut off your circulation.

Consider creating **raised beds** if you are starting a new garden or reshaping your old garden. Raised beds are easier to access and you can sit to work at them. Raised beds tend to require more water than traditional gardens, so you will want to make sure they are positioned close to a water source so you are not carrying hoses or buckets long distances. Growing on trellises, planting in tall containers (barrels), and placing containers on benches are also good ways to reduce the amount of bending required. Window boxes or hanging baskets can be used indoors as well. For hanging baskets, you can purchase or construct a pulley system to improve access for watering and pruning. If you garden from a sitting position, make sure your work surface is low enough that you won't have to raise your hands above your shoulders.

When you are creating a pathway in your garden there are a few tips to keep in mind to ensure it is **safe and accessible**. The path should be level and made of textured material for improved traction. The edges should be clearly marked with colored rocks or painted wooden edging, and adding lights to your path will aid visibility. Make sure you have placed benches or chairs along your pathway for the occasional rest break.

And finally, remember to **protect yourself from the sun**. Wear sunscreen, long sleeved shirts, and wide brimmed hats. Drink plenty of fluids and avoid working during peak sun hours of 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. If you are out during peak sun times, make sure you take plenty of breaks in the shade.

Happy gardening!

We Appreciate Your Feedback

If you have a comment or a suggestion for **PlanTalk**, please contact us at:

PlanTalk

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From the Boardroom

HEBP Board Changes

Lorraine Sigurdson of CUPE resigned her position on the HEBP Board of Trustees, and Brian Ellis was appointed as the new CUPE representative.

New HEBP Audit Committee Formed in October 2003

The HEBP Board has established an Audit Committee comprised of:

Mr. Terry Dyck
Manitoba Nurses Union

Mr. Gabriel Forest, FCA
Retired Partner, PricewaterhouseCoopers

Ms. Monica Girouard, CGA
Manitoba Government and General Employees Union

Mr. Pat Matthews, CA
Retired CFO, Gendis

Mr. Bob Vandewater (Chair)
VP CIBC Wood Gundy

Ex-officio, voting members include the Chair and Vice Chair of the HEBP Board, Bob Romphf of MNU, and Mark Neskar of Seven Oaks General Hospital.

Ex-officio, non-voting members include HEPP/HEBP's Executive Director, John McLaughlin; Director of Investments, Ronald Queck; Director of Finance, Rohini Halli; and Director of Benefits Administration, Kay Dunthorne.

The Inside Story

On Pension



Proposed Contribution Rate Increases for HEPP

The December 31, 2002 actuarial valuation of the Healthcare Employees Pension Plan (HEPP) revealed that current contribution levels are not adequate to fund the cost of benefits. Consequently, it is necessary to increase contribution rates.

The Plan's actuary, Towers Perrin, recommends increasing contribution rates to:

- 6.85% of pensionable earnings up to the Year's Maximum Pensionable Earnings (YMPE*) and
- 8.60% of earnings in excess of the YMPE.

Currently, the contribution rates are:

- 5.00% of pensionable earnings up to the YMPE, and
- 6.60% of pensionable earnings in excess of the YMPE.

Contribution rate increases may only be made if there is unanimous agreement of the parties to the Trust Agreement (Settlers) in writing. If the Settlers do not unanimously support increased contributions, the amendments will be subject to

a dispute resolution mechanism where at least two-thirds of the Signatory Boards and two-thirds of the Signatory Unions may agree to.

The HEPP Board of Trustees presented a formal proposal to the Settlers on September 19, 2003, seeking approval of the proposed contribution rates. All Settlers have responded to the proposal: the Union Settlers and the Regional Health Authorities of Manitoba have approved the new rates, and the St. Boniface General Hospital and the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority have not granted approval. As this does not represent unanimous support, the requested contribution rate increases are not forthcoming.

HEPP is now waiting until the completion of the December 31, 2003 actuarial valuation due in May 2004 before deciding on the next steps.

* YMPE is the maximum pensionable earnings limit under the Canada Pension Plan (\$40,500 in 2004)

Q-and-A's

The following questions and answers provide more information on the proposed pension contribution rate increases.

What is an actuarial valuation?

An actuarial valuation is an analysis of the financial condition of a Pension Plan. The purpose is to determine whether the plan can cover the cost of future benefits for all existing plan members based on the level of assets presently held.

What is the Trust Agreement?

Effective January 1, 1997, this agreement between the Signatory Boards and Signatory Unions established HEPP as the successor plan to the Health Sciences Centre/St. Boniface General Hospital Pension Plan and the Manitoba Health Organizations Pension Plan. In 1999, the St. Boniface General Hospital/Unions Pension Plan joined HEPP.

In addition to establishing how HEPP is operated and administered, the agreement states that if the actuary recommends an increase in contributions, or other action that requires additional cost to participating employers or members, such amendments shall only be made with the unanimous agreement of the Settlers in writing, or subject to a dispute resolution mechanism where at least two-thirds of the Signatory Boards and two-thirds of the Signatory Unions may agree to.

Who are the parties to the Trust Agreement (Settlers)?

The parties to the Trust Agreement (Settlers) include the Signatory Boards and Signatory Unions that participate in HEPP:

Signatory Boards:

- St. Boniface General Hospital
- Winnipeg Regional Health Authority
- Regional Health Authority (RHA) Stakeholders:
 - Interlake RHA
 - NOR-MAN RHA
 - South Eastman Health/Santé Sud-Est. Inc.
 - Brandon RHA
 - Churchill RHA Inc.
 - North Eastman Health Association Inc.
 - RHA-Central Manitoba Inc.
 - Burntwood RHA
 - Parkland RHA
 - Assiniboine RHA
 - Winnipeg RHA

Signatory Unions:

- Manitoba Nurses' Union
- Canadian Union of Public Employees
- Manitoba Government and General Employees' Union
- Manitoba Association of Health Care Professionals
- International Union of Operating Engineers
- Service Employees International Union
- Public Service Alliance of Canada
- Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada
- United Food and Commercial Workers Union Canada – Local 832

Will benefit reductions be considered in conjunction with contribution increases?

Prior to proposing contribution increases, the HEPP Board of Trustees considered a number of benefit reductions in conjunction with contribution increases. However, in comparing HEPP to similar plans, HEPP's contribution rates are lower, and it has no automatic provision for COLAs.

For these reasons, the Trustees decided benefits should not be reduced, as benefit reductions would make it more difficult to attract and retain qualified medical professionals.

As the proposed contribution rates were not approved by the parties to the Trust Agreement, other options to fund the cost of benefits will need to be put forward by the Board of Trustees; however, decisions will not be made until the completion of the December 31, 2003 actuarial valuation due in May 2004. HEPP remains hopeful that the proposed contribution rates will eventually be approved.

It is important to note that if amendments to the Pension Plan are required, the HEPP Board is committed to ensuring that any changes are equitable and fair to all active, retired and deferred members.

Will COLAs be granted in the future?

HEPP grants COLAs when the Board of Trustees determines there are sufficient surplus funds available, based on the plan's estimated financial position at the end of each year. A COLA was not granted on January 1, 2003 or January 1, 2004, and no COLA is anticipated for the foreseeable future.

Are the proposed contribution rates adequate to fund the plan?

Based on information available in December 2003, the plan actuary believes these proposed rates are sufficient for the long term.

Where can I get additional information?

Should you have additional questions or require further information, please contact HEPP at (204) 942-6591 or toll-free at 1-888-842-4233 and ask to speak to a Senior Benefits Administrator, or email your questions to: info@hepp.mb.ca.

