

Save Money Making Smart Benefits Choices

(NAPSA)—With health care costs and gas prices continuing to outpace inflation and pay raises, this open-enrollment period is a particularly crucial time if you are looking to save money in 2009. If you do your homework, evaluate your choices and make smart decisions, you can make choices that will allow you to take maximum advantage of the tax-based benefits your employer has to offer.

WageWorks, a leading employee benefits provider for a number of Fortune 500 companies, offers tips on how to save money:

•Take a look at combining a health savings account (HSA) with a low-monthly-premium health plan

HSAs allow people to save money tax-free for medical expenses, but they must be combined with a high-deductible health plan (HDHP). The combination provides the opportunity to save significantly on out-of-pocket health care expenses now and in the future. The funds in an HSA earn interest and can be invested, increasing the amount to be used for eligible health care expenses, or saved and not used. The best part of an HSA is that the amount you do not use gets rolled over year after year. An HDHP combined with an HSA is not just for the young and healthy. Depending on your own situation, it could be right for you, too.

•Save up to 40 percent with a flexible spending account (FSA)

FSAs are another great way for you to pay for your health care costs with pretax dollars. This particular benefit focuses on expenses not covered by your insurance plan, such as eye glasses, deductibles and over-the-counter drugs. It's possible to save more than \$1,000 with an FSA.

•Don't pass on your company's health reimbursement arrangement (HRA)

With an HRA, employers fund a health account that you can access to get reimbursed for eligible medical expenses. An HRA can work as a stand-alone benefits account or in conjunction with an FSA, although you can't be reimbursed twice for the same expense. The good news is that any remaining funds in an HRA may be rolled over to the next year.

•Reduce transportation expenses with commuter services

Many companies offer commuter benefit programs. Through deductions taken pretax from your paycheck, you can save up to 40 percent off the public transportation, vanpool and parking expenses, and also help the environment by cutting down on carbon waste. Commuter services can save you up to 40 percent on your transportation expenses.

•Get a health care debit card

If you participate in an HSA, FSA or HRA, check to see if your employer's plan offers a health care debit card. When you use this card, money is taken directly from your account so you don't have to pay out of your wallet for expenses and then wait to be reimbursed. And with new IRS rules that take effect January 1, 2009, the cards will be easier and more convenient to use than ever before.

"The best thing people can do during open enrollment is to look closely at all benefits programs, including health care, commuter services and wellness programs, which will deliver the right care and greatest savings," said Joe Jackson, CEO, WageWorks.

To learn more, visit www.wageworks.com.