



Health Equity, COVID-19: Large Employers' Response to Crises

August 2020



PBGH
PACIFIC BUSINESS
GROUP ON HEALTH

The Pacific Business Group on Health (PBGH) surveyed its members regarding the COVID-19 health crisis and their plans to return employees to work, support workers with young children not able to attend school this fall, and to address the health inequities that COVID-19 has exacerbated.

The survey results presented in this report reflect the responses from 15 large employers providing health benefits to roughly **four million employees and their dependents**.

Highlights:

- **Rise in COVID cases is altering return-to-work plans:** 57% of respondents report putting plans to return employees to work on hold in response to the dramatic rise in cases, while 43% are enhancing safety measures to ensure safe return.
- **Most employers are providing new supports to working parents:** 82% of respondents say they're creating flexible work schedules for parents with young children not able to return to onsite schools this fall.
- **Employers are taking action to address social and health inequities:** 67% are evaluating benefits and health programs to ensure equity in access and use of benefits.
- **Majority are addressing social determinants of health:** 46% are taking various approaches to ensuring equitable access to health services, while nearly 31% are addressing the impact of financial insecurity on their employees.
- **Most employers primarily concerned about inequities in access to three types of care:** 73% say they're most concerned about employees' access to behavioral and mental health services; 53% say their biggest concern is chronic disease management, while 47% report inequity in primary care as a top concern.

Nearly 60% say they've put return-to-work plans on hold

43% will enhance safety measures as they work to return to employees to onsite work

Has the recent dramatic rise in coronavirus cases changed your company's views/plans regarding timelines, methods for return-to-work, safeguards and testing?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
No, the rise in cases has not changed our plans or timeline to return employees to work	7.14%
Yes, the rise in cases has put our plans on hold until circumstances change	57.14%
We continue to plan for return to work but have enhanced safety measures (requiring masks, redesigning workspaces for social distancing, temperature and symptom checking, testing)	42.86%
Other (please specify)	7.14%

82% are creating flexible schedules for parents with young children

With widespread school closures, how is your company responding to staff with children and childcare concerns?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
We're providing additional childcare options through specialty vendors	18.18%
We're safely reopening our on-site childcare centers	0.00%
We're creating flexible schedules for parents with young children	81.82%
Other (please specify)	36.36%

Other: paying for leave to accommodate remote child learning, hiring caregivers/teachers to watch children in an onsite conference room.

Efforts to Address Social and Health Inequities

All organizations taking action.

67% evaluating benefits and health programs to ensure equity in access and use.

Which of the following efforts is your organization taking to address social and health inequities?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Donating to organizations addressing these issues	60.00%
C-suite and/or Board calling for organizational-wide initiatives across the company (e.g., hiring, promotional advancement, compensation equity)	80.00%
Hiring a diversity and inclusion leader	33.33%
Working with our local communities in the places in which we do business or are based	66.67%
Evaluating benefits and health & wellness programs to ensure equity in access and use	66.67%
We're taking no action	0.00%
Other (please specify)	33.33%

Other: Work within marginalized groups communities, strategies to increase health equity in purchasing, internal town hall style conversations with our leaders, staff training.

Majority taking specific steps through benefit design and in working with the health system.

Telehealth and primary care are leading current steps

What specific steps is your company taking or planning to take through benefit design and working with the health care system?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Expanding access to providers (for example, in underserved areas)	14.29%
Expanding and/or ensuring employee access to culturally representative health care providers	21.43%
Requiring health plans to provide utilization and outcomes data by race, ethnicity, language, and gender	21.43%
Requiring plans to meet performance-based targets for equitable access	7.14%
Requiring directly contracted providers to provide utilization and outcomes data by race, ethnicity, language, and gender	7.14%
Ensuring plans are reimbursing providers for telehealth services	57.14%
Increasing primary care access and services	35.71%
Expanding benefits for non-medical services (transportation, nutrition)	14.29%
Examining cost-sharing to increase early intervention and affordability	14.29%
Eliminating prior authorization and concurrent review requirements for certain services	0.00%
Implementing salary-based benefit employee premiums	7.14%
Implementing salary-based HSA seed contributions	7.14%
We are not taking specific steps at this time	28.57%
Other (please specify)	7.14%

Majority are addressing SODH in some way.

If you are placing a greater emphasis on social determinants of health, where will you be focusing your efforts?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Housing	0.00%
Food insecurity	7.69%
Financial insecurity	30.77%
Transportation	23.08%
All of the above	23.08%
None of the above	15.38%
Other (please specify)	46.15%

Other: equitable access to health care, working with health insurers to reduce practical barriers to care, working mostly through Medicaid programs.

Leading concerns are inequities in mental health, chronic disease and primary care

Which of the following areas of health care services are you most concerned about inequities impacting your employees?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Behavioral/mental health	73.33%
Maternity	20.00%
Cancer diagnosis and care	0.00%
Primary care	46.67%
Chronic disease management	53.33%
Access to COVID-19 vaccine (when/if available)	6.67%
Other (please specify)	20.00%

Other: LGBTQ inequities, generous funding of HSAs and low annual out-of-pocket limits.

Respondents were mixed on reforming payment for primary and community-based care

Have you taken steps to alter provider payment to enable more robust primary and community-based care?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
We have not taken action to change the way we pay for primary care but intend to	36.36%
We are currently working with our health plans to pay primary care practices prospectively	9.09%
We will not be reforming our current payment mechanisms for primary/community-based care	54.55%

Respondents split on investing in or partnering with public health

Is your company taking any steps to invest in or partner with public health entities?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Yes, we are engaging with public health officials in communities in which we work	21.43%
We have not yet engaged but are considering doing so	28.57%
We do not intend to get involved directly with public health	50.00%



PBGH's member organizations -- private employers and public agencies -- are the most powerful voice for consumers and patients in the U.S.

PBGH has a long history of developing, incubating and launching successful operational programs on behalf of and in partnership with large employers. Our initiatives are designed to test innovative health care methods and scale successful approaches that lower health care costs and increase quality across the U.S.

PBGH harnesses the clout and concentrated power of our member organizations to deliver impressive results rarely seen in the health care market, including reductions in the cost of health insurance premiums and unnecessary surgeries. Since its inception, PBGH has made some of the most notable improvements to U.S. health care, including launching the first public website displaying health plan, hospital and medical group quality and patient experience data, influencing the drafting of the Affordable Care Act to emphasize federal value purchasing and accountability, representing purchasers in the Meaningful Use Health IT roll-out, and implementing the Intensive Outpatient Care Program (IOCP) for Americans with serious chronic illness in five states.

Our mission and our work are clear and uncompromising. We are a purchaser-only coalition influencing the health care market in the service of employers and their employees.