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Benefit Innovation Report

Adapting Innovative Benefits
to a Remote and Hybrid Workforce



The New Dynamic



In 2021, businesses started settling into a new dynamic: remote and hybrid workforces. While the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic forced companies to keep employees at home, the vast majority of workers now expect to maintain their new flexible schedules. The remote and hybrid workforce is here to stay.

Flexibility isn't the only employee demand. The "Great Resignation" put employees in the driver's seat, increasing their expectations for employers to better protect their health, finances, and families. By providing innovative benefits, employers can improve employee well-being, encourage greater retention and attraction, and offer a culture of caring regardless of where the workforce resides.

With the input of our benefit experts, this report covers the benefits, technology, and communication recommended to build an innovative benefit program in 2022.



Top Areas of Innovation in Benefits Today

Innovation is all about looking ahead and anticipating needs. With that in mind, we asked our experts who interface with brokers and employers everyday which benefits must be considered when building an innovative benefit program in 2022. The following services are ranked from most to least important.

Mental Health Services

“Depression and anxiety are at notable all-time rates. The instinct of employees is to look towards their employer for assistance, and HR leaders around the country are taking action. Issues of provider access/timely appointments, affordability, and a lack of providers personifying diversity and inclusivity, are forcing employers to expand their mental health benefits beyond the reliance of ‘what is in the medical plan’.”

Jake Cleer
Vice President, Sales



Having a mental health resource is no longer innovative — in 2022, it should be a given. Mental health takes our top spot again this year because employers need to go beyond the bare minimum to meet the mental health needs of a diverse, remote workforce.

Outside of pregnancy, mental health conditions are among the [top five reasons](#) for U.S. workers to file a short-term

disability claim, according to The Hartford. When employees receive treatment for mental health concerns, they're less likely to end up in the ER or hospital, decreasing healthcare costs by up to [\\$1,377 per person](#) in one year.

A recent Integrated Benefits Institute report says [two in five](#) employees have symptoms of anxiety or depression disorder, but no two employees

are suffering the same way. Mental health issues fall on a spectrum, from facing moments of great stress to managing a chemical imbalance in the brain, and require a spectrum of solutions. Not every employee needs to be on medication, nor do they need consistent talk therapy. If employers only offer one mental health resource, they may be missing the mark.

Innovative Mental Health Services

- ▶ **Virtual mental health counseling** connects employees with licensed therapists and psychiatrists via video or phone, available at a lower cost per visit which can be covered by the employer
- ▶ **Well-being education video libraries** create a non-intimidating first step for employees who want to learn more about coping with their disorder but aren't ready to work with a professional
- ▶ **Mental health apps** offer on-demand, low-risk opportunities for guided meditation, text conversations with counselors, and other resources to relieve stress as needed
- ▶ **Counseling hotlines** provide talk therapy without the need for continued sessions, giving space to talk through anxiety, grief, etc. in one-off calls

Virtual Healthcare Solutions

"With physician shortages at an all-time high and the lack of affordability through traditional insurance, Americans are not able to access the care they need. Over the next few years, virtual care delivery will move from an 'alternative' to a 'standard' access point of care."

Brian Latkowski
Executive Vice President, Sales

Like mental health, virtual care should not be considered innovative in 2022 if it only includes telemedicine for acute care. Employees can now virtually access primary care, chronic care, mental health, physical therapy, second opinions, and more. The pandemic has given healthcare providers and consumers alike the "aha" moment virtual care needed to grow, develop, and thrive.

Chronic care management and second opinions will likely be the top areas of virtual care growth, considering the large opportunity to reduce their costs. The

CDC reports fifty percent of Americans live with a chronic condition, costing employers [\\$36.4 billion](#) every year in missed workdays. Up to [20%](#) of medical cases nationwide are misdiagnosed, leading to unnecessary, costly surgeries and other services. Eliminating unscheduled time away from work to address these issues can save employers around [\\$3,000 per employee](#) each year.

Employers should review virtual care solutions available to address their main healthcare cost drivers.

Innovative Virtual Healthcare Solutions

- ▶ **Virtual second opinions** conveniently connect employees with the best medical expert for their case to ensure they have the right diagnosis and treatment plan
- ▶ **Virtual chronic condition management** helps employees stay in touch with their provider for more timely and convenient care, and increases access to specialized care for those in rural areas
- ▶ **Online medical assistance platforms** replace search engine doctors with actual healthcare professionals so employees can receive trusted, reputable answers to their medical questions
- ▶ **Telemedicine** gives employees and their family a safer, more affordable way to access acute care, follow-up care with primary care physicians, and more



Health Advocacy & Medical Bill Review

“Between researching different providers, deciphering what insurance will or won’t cover, and being endlessly transferred from one department to another: finding good, affordable care feels impossible. Employers can empower their employees to make smarter healthcare choices by providing user-friendly, concierge-level advocacy services to cut through the red tape on their behalf, finding appropriate care solutions effectively and efficiently.”

Alyssa Church
Client Success Pro

Employees care more about their benefits this year than ever before. In Open Enrollment for 2022, **66% of employees** expressed more interest in their employer’s offerings and two in three workers planned to spend more time reviewing their benefits. Health advocacy services help employees make the most of the benefits they are now carefully selecting, removing the load from HR to answer all their questions and

guiding employees toward the most effective care decisions. Health advocates give employees an expert in their back pocket. In a quick call, employees gain access to a friendly voice who knows their health plan, can explain the benefits, and find a high-quality, cost-effective, in-network provider. Advocacy takes the friction out of healthcare. Health advocacy can also address surprise billing, which is hard to avoid

for employees who don’t know an in-network hospital could put them under the care of out-of-network providers. An advocate will review the medical bill, correct any coding errors, negotiate the price, and help set up a payment plan, all on the employee’s behalf. With an advocacy solution, employees save time and stress, and employers reduce their healthcare expenses.



Innovative Health Advocacy Features

- ▶ **Agnostic health advocacy programs** stand apart from insurance, providing consistency if the plans change year-to-year
- ▶ **Medical bill reviewers** ensure employees are charged appropriately for their healthcare services, correcting coding errors and negotiating prices on the employee’s behalf
- ▶ **Digital pricing tools** allow employees to compare the costs of in-network providers, services, and prescriptions based on quality and personal preferences

Family Building Solutions

"Fertility, surrogacy, and adoption benefits are inclusive, providing a solution for not only male and female couples, but also for single adults and the LGBTQ+ community."

Meagan Ponder
Vendor Relations Manager

Fertility benefits are still considered innovative in 2022, but they are quickly becoming a crucial retention and recruitment tool. The key to an innovative family building solution is inclusivity. Nearly [50% of companies](#) currently offer a fertility benefit, but employers have an opportunity to provide a more inclusive solution by expanding with surrogacy and adoption

services, which only 9% currently offer. Women over the age of 30 are having more babies than women under 30, often freezing eggs ahead of time or taking fertility treatments, and [63%](#) of the LGBTQ+ community are leaning on reproductive care or adoption to grow their families.

Struggling with complicated and expensive fertility, surrogacy, or adoption

processes creates a great source of stress for employees: emotionally, financially, and physically. Employers can reduce employee stress and create an inclusive culture of caring by providing resources and financial assistance for family building services.

Innovative Family Building Services

- ▶ **Fertility advocacy programs** create personalized treatment plans for employees struggling with infertility, including discounted services and counseling
- ▶ **Fertility treatment coverage** can fully or partially pay for an employee's fertility treatment, including diagnosis, IVF, and medications
- ▶ **Adoption and foster care support** helps employees navigate the process, seek legal counsel, and apply for appropriate financial aid
- ▶ **Third party reproduction resources** aid in covering costs and providing resources for employees wanting to grow their families through surrogacy, or egg or sperm donation

Caregiver Support

“Caregiving is an expectation in most households, but the responsibility is often approached with a “figure it out” attitude which can create significant emotional, physical, and financial problems. People don’t know what they don’t know. Caregivers need beneficial tools to make better decisions with the right support.”

Dulce Bozeman
President & Chief People
Officer



The pandemic shifted how we live and work, and highlighted the struggle families go through balancing the two. Providing care, either for children or adults, requires an average [28 to 61 hours](#) per week, as well as emotional and financial support. [Sixty-one percent](#) of caregivers work while caregiving. When an employee takes on the majority of caregiving responsibilities, the

job usually becomes a lower priority. Since the onset of the pandemic, more than a [quarter of caregivers](#) for adults and [2.3 million women](#) have either reduced their work hours or left the workforce completely to focus on their caregiving responsibilities. Employees should not have to choose between their salary and sense of purpose they gain at work, or

the challenging but rewarding experience of caregiving. Offering tools and resources to help employees find affordable care solutions relieves stress and lets them focus on work, at work. Employers can look forward to higher productivity, increased retention, and a boost in recruitment, as lack of available, affordable care can deter talent from entering the workforce.

Innovative Caregiver Support Solutions

- ▶ **Online caregiver portals** give employees doubling as caregivers a single place to stay organized, relieving stress with tools to store vital medical information, update the care team, and join virtual support groups
- ▶ **Companionship programs** allow caregivers or those receiving care to hire additional help around the house on an hourly basis, or just someone to spend time with
- ▶ **Back-up childcare assistance** provides a last-minute solution if any unexpected issues occur, like school closures or a child getting sick
- ▶ **Flexible childcare spending accounts** work similarly to HSAs, where employees can withhold money from their paychecks before it’s taxed (and employers can match) to pay for daycare, nannies, etc.

Health Protection Benefits

“One thing has been made abundantly clear since the start of the pandemic - we have a dynamic and competitive workforce who are more than willing to move on to new jobs with higher pay and better benefits. However, one thing which has remained consistent for all employers is the need to set themselves apart with solutions to fill in the gaps of standard employee benefit programs.”

Raygin Burris
Executive Vice President of
Client Success



Facing a pandemic forced many to see the gaps in their healthcare coverage, or realize youth and good health don't make a person indestructible. Employees want help fighting against the unanticipated. In response, **more than half** of U.S. workers now view voluntary benefits such as critical illness

and life insurance as core components of a comprehensive benefits program.

Worksite products like hospital indemnity, critical illness, and cancer insurance have existed for awhile. Although the benefits themselves cannot be considered innovative in 2022, they can and should

be in the way employers package and offer these solutions. Bundling voluntary benefits with other financial tools or mental health resources shows the value of the product beyond just another insurance bill.

Innovative Health Protection Benefit Bundles

- ▶ Bundle Life Insurance with ID Theft Protection and Global Travel Protection to create a **“Peace of Mind” package**
- ▶ Offer Critical Illness Insurance alongside access to a Financial Advisor and Emergency Savings Tool to form a **Financial Wellness product**
- ▶ Create a **Healthcare Financial Safety Net** solution with Hospital Indemnity Insurance, Health Advocacy, and Medical Bill Saver

Fitness Programs

“Many employees have fallen out of their fitness routines due to gym closures and other responsibilities during the pandemic. At the same time, the mental health of the American workforce has been on the decline. Offering discounts on in-person gym memberships for those ready to get back in the gym, and online workout programs for those ready to start their fitness journey at home, are an essential piece of the puzzle to getting employees healthy again, both physically and mentally.”

Brian Del Savio
Client Success Manager

Up to 90% of health care spending is associated with employees' unhealthy lifestyle choices, including poor nutrition and not enough exercise. American workers already had a sedentary lifestyle, but remote work has made it even worse. Employers need to help employees find their motivation to workout

in order to cut down healthcare expenses, improve productivity, and reduce stress. Exercise isn't just for weight loss. Companies should also encourage working out in order to help employees improve mental health, quit smoking, and prevent substance abuse. A recent [ClassPass survey](#) found nearly

90% of employees felt more productive during the work day after a workout, and around 96% felt considerably less stressed. However, not every employee wants to go to the gym or even feels comfortable doing so, meaning gym membership reimbursements cannot be the only

option. An innovative fitness program will have two things: inclusive, adaptable options for all employees, and a system for motivation and accountability.

Innovative Fitness Benefits

- ▶ **Reimbursements for gym memberships and on-demand workout programs**, giving employees the option of fitting workouts within their schedule from any location
- ▶ **Subsidies for home gym equipment, workout clothes, and gym shoes** so employees have the flexibility to use funds toward exercise they enjoy, from riding a stationary bike at home to going on walks around the local park
- ▶ **Gamification apps** with prizes to increase motivation and accountability for working out and making healthier choices



Pet Care

“Pet Care is one of the most sought out benefits in the marketplace. It can have a major financial impact for families with pets because veterinary costs add up throughout the year.”

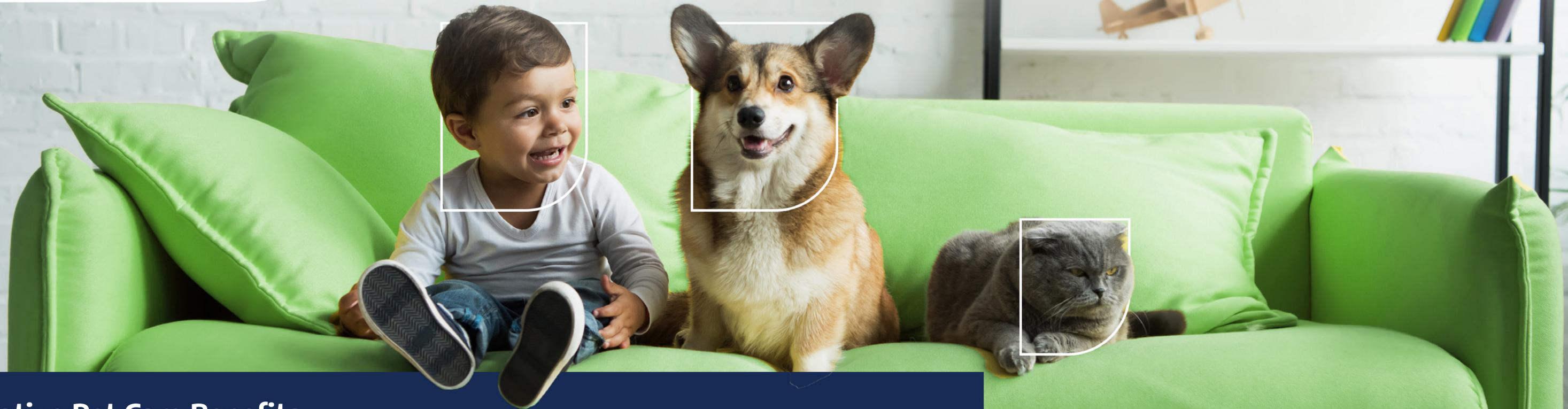
Collin Ray
Vice President, Sales

Recent figures show nearly 70% of American households have a pet, and about 20% brought a new cat or dog into their families since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Most people consider pets part of their family and will spend the same if not more on a

pet’s healthcare than their own. As much as people love their pets, the cost of keeping a pet is pretty pricey. Even a healthy dog or cat requires regular vet visits and vaccinations, all of which add up quickly. As pets age they may need to visit specialists,

be on expensive medications, or require surgery. Pet-loving employees are asking employers for solutions, like pet insurance, to help keep these costs in check. Pet insurance is in the top five unconventional job benefits to attract and retain employees,

according to Forbes, and it’s only going to grow in popularity. Not very many companies offer this benefit yet, so there is still a great opportunity to get in the door early.



Innovative Pet Care Benefits

- ▶ **Pet insurance** works similarly to human health insurance, protecting pet owners from high medical costs by covering certain vet services and procedures after paying a monthly premium
- ▶ **Discount veterinary networks** provide access to a select group of vets who offer a discounted rate on services, helping employees save on visits as needed
- ▶ **Pet prescription discount programs** include savings on human crossover medications, which are drugs both humans and pets can take like antibiotics and arthritis treatment

Financial Security

“Financial stress leads to physical and mental illness in workers. By providing financial wellness programs, employers can help lower employee turnover, reduce absenteeism, minimize requests for loans and advancements, and improve morale.”

Marti Powles
Chief Operating Officer

Once again, despite the overwhelming health, social, and political issues our world is facing, personal finances continue to be the [number one](#) source of stress for Americans. For most people it comes down to a lack of financial security. Most adults do not have enough in their bank account to handle an emergency, let alone have the extra funds to invest or plan for retirement.

Financially stressed individuals are more likely to enter a cycle of [poor financial decisions](#), such as building credit card debt, withdrawing funds early from retirement accounts, and taking out high-interest loans. Employees in this cycle are bringing their stress to work, costing businesses about \$2,800 per year per employee. Employees want to be able to

build their savings, plan for the future, and work with an advisor who can set them up for success. However, working with a financial advisor feels like a luxury, out of reach for most rank-and-file workers. Employers should focus on bringing these “luxury” resources within reach for all employees to reduce financial stress.

Innovative Financial Security Solutions

- ▶ **Financial advice hotlines** are a more accessible platform for employees seeking help, available on-demand for any financial questions or issues
- ▶ **On-demand pay platforms** allow employees to withdraw a portion of their earned wages before payday, helping them cover expenses and meet payment deadlines without relying on high-interest payday loans
- ▶ **Emergency savings accounts and rainy day funds** help employees create a safety net of cash in case of emergency, with the option to automatically deposit funds through payroll deductions
- ▶ **Debt relief programs** work to negotiate better payment plans or consolidate loans to help employees pay off debt and save money



A man with a beard is sitting at a desk in a home office, looking at several computer monitors. The monitors display various data visualizations, including maps and charts. The room has a rustic wooden wall and grey curtains.

Honorable Mention: Digital Wellness

"In the past, we have focused a lot on physical, mental and financial wellness, but haven't really considered digital wellness. Digital wellness encompasses not only identity theft protection and resolution, but also device security and online privacy. As our lives are increasingly lived online, it is important to recognize how our digital presence impacts the other areas of our well-being."

Amanda Franklin
Executive Vice President of Operations

Identity theft protection has been rising in popularity as a voluntary benefit, and even more so now as employees work remotely and risk of security issues has increased. In fact, [nearly half](#) of benefit brokers say their employer clients are concerned about data breaches and cyber threats in the coming year,

and 65% say their clients are requesting an ID theft protection benefit for employees. As digital threats have become more extensive, so should our efforts to protect against them. A more innovative approach is to focus on digital wellness, which provides protection from online crime beyond identity

theft and financial fraud. Digital wellness secures employees' internet connection and devices, prevents sites from tracking their information, reduces spam mail, and more, helping make the internet a safer place. It's the new frontier of ID theft protection.



Impact of Innovation: Creating a Culture Boost

The rise in remote and hybrid work is going to keep the workforce spread out, increasing the challenge for employers to engage their employees. A strong culture is crucial, and benefits are key. By providing personalized benefits to address the real life problems of employees, employers create a “culture boost” extending beyond the walls of a workplace.



“Strong work cultures are a critical part of every successful company and cannot be taken for granted. While the pandemic has turned the business world upside down, forward thinking companies don’t dwell on the past. Rather, each company regardless of size must pivot toward the future and update its policies to reflect the current business environment. Effective leaders will invest in their employees to create a new approach to nurture, motivate, and inspire them by providing the flexibility to achieve a better work/life balance as well as addressing their mental and financial health.”

Joel Ray
Chief Executive Officer

Building a Culture Without Walls

Culture is the character of an organization. It was easy to spot when employees were all in one place: a person could walk through the doors and get a feel for the company’s warmth, friendliness, and innovative spirit. Outside the four walls of a shared building,

employers should now be more creative than ever to instill a collaborative culture and superior customer service experience.

Wellness benefits can be utilized by employers to take care of an employee’s personal needs, achieve better retention

and engagement, and attract top talent. A meaningful package of benefits will show employees how much they are valued.

Make it Personal

"Benefits have such a personal impact on employees' lives, so we shouldn't present these solutions like we're just filling a corporate obligation. Our employees are real people with real needs and issues. Let your employees know you see them and you are here to help."

Nicole Liebnick
Vice President of Marketing



All the effort to create a culture boost with great benefits falls short without proper communication and education. If employees only hear about their benefits at Open Enrollment, unique solutions for mental health or caregiver support are likely to get lost in the shuffle. Employers also lose the opportunity to create context for benefits employees may not fully understand.

To create a strong, year-round benefit communication plan, employers should include:

All-in-One Access

Putting all benefits in one central location, especially a mobile app or member portal, removes the friction from using benefits. Employees only need to remember one login, and all their benefits are just a tap away.

Letter from the CEO

To truly understand how benefits work or why they're important, employees need context. A personal letter or video message from the CEO discussing how one or two of the offered benefits impacted their own life can go a long way.

Timely Reminders

Employees may be excited about a telemedicine benefit when signing up for it, then completely forget about the service when they need it. Timely reminders sent by text, push notification, email, or intranet site keep benefits top-of-mind.

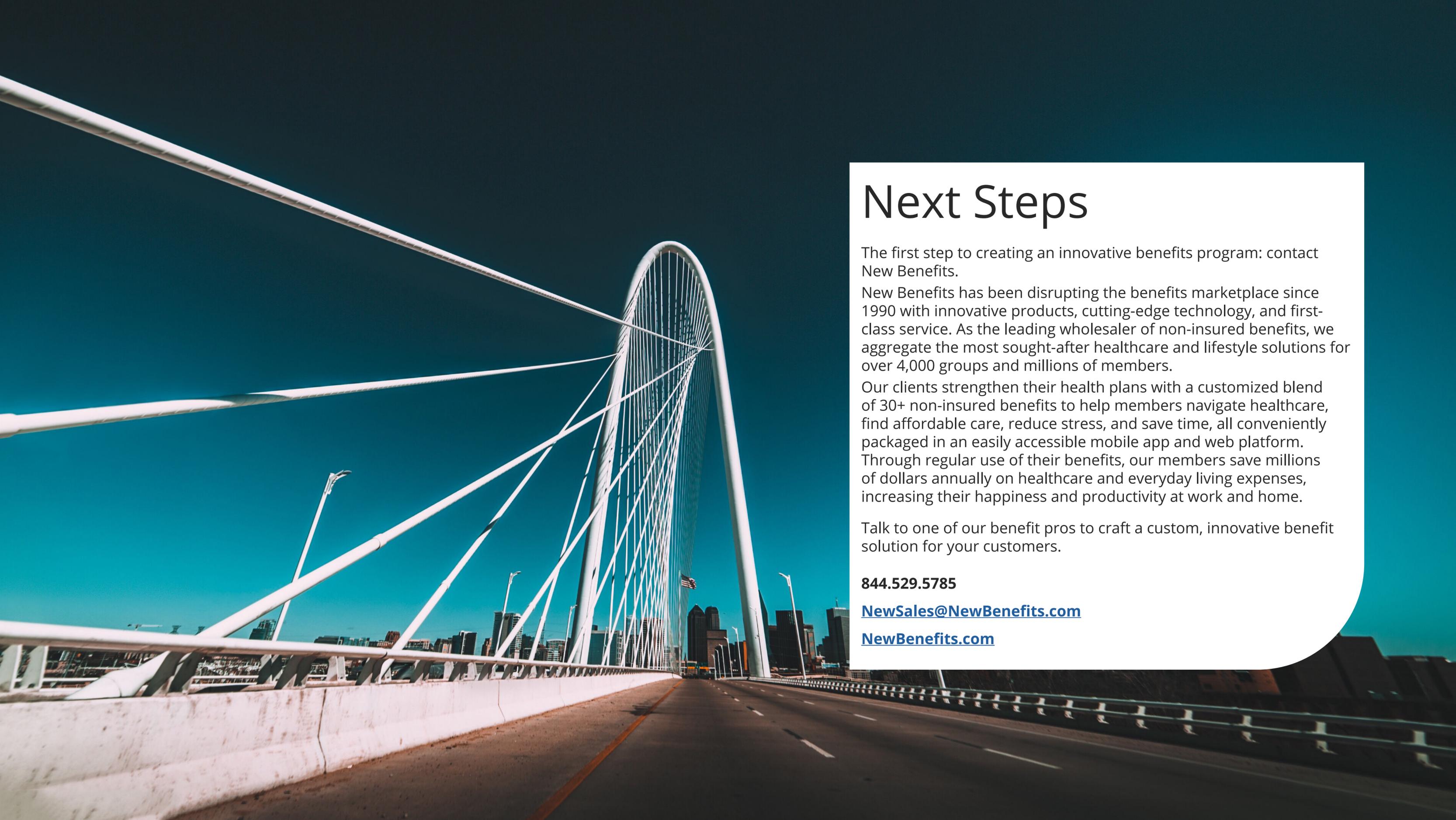
In Summary

The workplace has shifted quickly in response to the pandemic, and brokers who do not offer innovative solutions will be left behind. Benefits focused on improving well-being will be key for employers to engage their employees, retain strong performers, and attract top talent. Non-insured benefits are adaptable to a remote and hybrid workforce, and have the flexibility to fit groups of any size, industry, and budget.

To create an innovative benefits experience, employers have to think beyond the status quo and take a personal approach to addressing employees' health and well-being. This approach consists of:

- ▶ Having the right benefits to meet the diverse needs of today's workforce while considering employees' total well-being in the wake of COVID-19
- ▶ Creating a culture of caring outside the walls of an office building
- ▶ Developing a strong employee engagement strategy with personal communication
- ▶ Working with a strong partner who can customize the benefit program to your needs and walk with you every step of the way





Next Steps

The first step to creating an innovative benefits program: contact New Benefits.

New Benefits has been disrupting the benefits marketplace since 1990 with innovative products, cutting-edge technology, and first-class service. As the leading wholesaler of non-insured benefits, we aggregate the most sought-after healthcare and lifestyle solutions for over 4,000 groups and millions of members.

Our clients strengthen their health plans with a customized blend of 30+ non-insured benefits to help members navigate healthcare, find affordable care, reduce stress, and save time, all conveniently packaged in an easily accessible mobile app and web platform. Through regular use of their benefits, our members save millions of dollars annually on healthcare and everyday living expenses, increasing their happiness and productivity at work and home.

Talk to one of our benefit pros to craft a custom, innovative benefit solution for your customers.

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