The Benefits Team

Of the current 29 staff members in the NAD Retirement Plans Office, 12 are known as the ‘Benefits Team’. This group of hard-working, dedicated individuals spends their days processing new applications and implementing benefits from our Church and Hospital defined benefit ‘legacy’ programs. In 2011, more than 1,200 new applicants were enrolled for benefits, and at any given time there are usually more than 300 applications waiting in queue to be processed. With the ‘Baby Boomers’ reaching retirement age at ever increasing numbers, the volume of new applications flowing into our office has not yet hit it’s peak.

In January 2012, a new web-based benefits software application was launched in our office, designed to integrate with the benefits calculator used by participating employers in the field to electronically submit applications to our office and ultimately integrate the new retiree data into our benefits distribution (payroll) center. Our goal is to limit the amount of manual data entry necessary so as to make the process more accurate and efficient and, therefore, reduce the time it takes to get a new retiree’s benefits into a ‘pay’ mode. A turn-around time of two months from the date the application is received to payroll authorization is what we are aiming for—down from the average four months it takes now.

In addition to new retiree applications, our Benefits Team fields calls from retirees to answer questions and update files as life events occur. Upon notification of a divorce or death, rates are adjusted or discontinued as appropriate, with death benefits calculated and processed when applicable. And when we are notified of the passing of a retiree who has an eligible spouse, survivor benefits are calculated and adjustments put into place.

Prior to actual retirement, Benefits Team members work with employers to assist with estimates of future benefits and help them better understand current Retirement Plan policies. In so doing, the employers can then provide more accurate information directly to their employees who ask questions as they begin to think about retirement planning.

Benefits Assistants are sensitive to the fact that the transition from employment into retirement is generally a unique and sometimes anxious experience. Our goal is to provide timely communication and responsiveness during the application process in order to make the transition as smooth as possible while assuring each retiree receives maximum benefits in accordance with Retirement Plan policy.
Retirees on Medicaid

For various reasons some retirees find it necessary to apply for Medicaid—a joint federal/state health insurance program, administered by the state for the benefit of those with limited income and resources. This may happen when a retiree or spouse is required to go into long term care such as in a nursing home. The various states have some discretion in determining which groups of people Medicaid will cover and the financial criteria for Medicaid eligibility. Unlike Medicare, Medicaid has some provision for assisting with custodial care, under certain specific eligibility criteria.

States have various and often complex rules in determining eligibility for Medicaid. The family may need to require the services of a consultant in understanding and complying with these regulations. Our office is not trained to provide such assistance.

However if a retiree or spouse has been enrolled in Medicaid, it is important that our office be provided this information as soon as possible. Certain benefits and reimbursements from the Plan may be impacted. For instance, when a retiree seeks Medicaid assistance due to residency in a long-term care facility, it is not uncommon for the “well” spouse to request that the retirement benefits be divided between the two spouses in order to protect income from Medicaid “spend-down” rules for the spouse not needing the assistance of Medicaid. Some states allow for the division of the monthly benefit to ensure some income goes to the “well” spouse—but only with the approval of the applicable state agency, social service or welfare office. In such a situation, please authorize your social services agent to contact the retirement plan office for specific information about your benefits.

Newsletter Mailing List

We have recently changed the software platform from which we extract our mailing list for the Reflections newsletter. We continue to try to clean up our mailing list. Anytime there is such a change, it might create some anomalies.

If you are getting two newsletters, drop us a note and let us know. If you know a retiree who should be getting the newsletter and is not, please drop us a note and let us know.

Either mail to
Reflections, Adventist Retirement
12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring MD 20904

Or e-mail to
NADRetirement@NAD.Adventist.org

In previous years some of you have informed us that we are sending a newsletter to both husband and wife, and that is not necessary. We have sought to clear up such duplicates to one address, but have found that we inadvertently eliminate individuals living at the same address such as a retirement center, with the same last name who are not the same family.

We’ve also heard from some of you that your newsletter has been arriving quite late. We are working on improving the timeliness of the release of the newsletter and apologize. Thanks for your patience.
Ministers and VALIC Withdrawals

Eligible retired ministers may reduce their taxable income due to Parsonage Allowance Exclusion for pension income, but also for withdrawals from their Adventist Retirement Plan, otherwise known as their VALIC account. However in order that VALIC will properly mark the 1099-R as eligible for parsonage allowance exclusion, the minister should fill out our Parsonage Allowance Designation Form. This form can be found on our web site www.adventistretirement.org. Go to the Retirees tab and click on the “Downloads” link. Scroll and search for the form, print it, sign it and follow instructions seeking the necessary signatures. Once Retirement receives it, we will instruct VALIC to consider future withdrawals to be eligible for parsonage allowance exclusion. It is only necessary to submit this form to our office once, not annually.

SHARP Corner

Standard SHARP Rx Option; SHINGLES VACCINE and SELF ADMINISTERED DRUGS

The Standard SHARP Rx Option includes reimbursement assistance for the shingles vaccine and for self administered drugs in a hospital outpatient setting as defined by Medicare.

To receive reimbursement of the cost of the shingles vaccine and self administered drugs you must currently be a participant in the SHARP Rx Option. The plan does not offer assistance for the vaccine nor the self administered drugs denied by Medicare, for retirees not participating in the Standard SHARP Rx Option. SHARP follows the guidelines of Medicare with regards to these two drug services. Medicare considers these services under a Medicare Part D program only. The shingles vaccine and self administered drugs are not covered under Medicare Part A (hospitalization) or Part B (Dr. Office visits).

If you are an Rx Option participant, SHARP reimburses 80% of the cost of the shingles vaccine and 80% of the cost denied by Medicare for self administered drugs. Submit your claim directly to the claims office address: Adventist Risk Management, Inc. PO Box 1928 Grapevine, TX 76090. Provide your member ID number on your claim. SHARP does not require you to use a claim submission form.
Medco Assistance in Spanish

The Medco member website (www.medco.com) includes online help in Spanish for key applications within the existing English-language website. If retirees choose the “en Espanol” link from the medco.com homepage and register/log-in via the existing Spanish home page, they will be able to reference help written in Spanish for frequently used online features, including order center, order status, price a medication and My Rx Choices®.