



# The modern guide to impactful employee benefits communications

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## Employers spend millions to provide workers with comprehensive health benefits, yet engagement often falls short.

When employees don't know what's available—or simply forget—they don't use their benefits, and companies miss out on the cost savings, improved health and employee satisfaction outcomes they desperately seek.

In reality, employees typically only think about their benefits during open enrollment, or when an immediate need pops up.

This lack of engagement feels even more disconcerting considering how employer health costs are projected to increase by **5.8% in 2025**, the third consecutive year over 5%. Costs are projected to be even higher for smaller employers at 9%.

Rather than joining the **53% of employers** who plan to implement cost-cutting strategies like raising deductibles, employers can reverse the low-engagement slump by deploying a modern, B2C-inspired approach that uses the same attention-grabbing tactics top marketers rely on to build awareness year-round.



# Part 1: A Modern Approach to Benefits Comms

HR leaders spend ample time promoting employee benefits and fielding questions during open enrollment, but momentum fades as the year unfolds.

“When we don’t talk about benefits consistently, we miss an opportunity to make sure employees know all about the support they have,” says Meredith Fish, SVP of Human Resources at Lantern.

And if you’re worried about overcommunicating, consider this statistic: **66% of employees** say they want to hear more about their benefits, and not just during open enrollment, but year-round.

Use these strategies to optimize your benefits communication strategy, whether you’re launching a new benefit like a **Center of Excellence program** or reminding workers of existing services.

## Take an Omnichannel Approach to Communications

There’s no right way or magic solution to communicate effectively with employees. The message just needs to resonate and reach them easily. But that will depend on your unique employee makeup.

“You have to meet employees where they are. That means synchronizing communications with employees’ preferences, work environment and daily routines,” Fish says. “You want to get your message out there in different ways. We have several generations in the workforce right now, and they all communicate differently.”

An employee working on the line or in the classroom may not see an email, but they’ll certainly notice a sign hung by the time clock or in the breakroom.

An omnichannel communications strategy can include any, or all, of the following.

- Email
- Slack and Teams posts
- Social media posts, memes
- Intranet
- Text messages
- Print: posters, banners, desk drops, table tents
- Home mailers, letters to spouses
- Lunch and learns, webinars
- Contests and gamification

Make sure to keep the messaging to the point and jargon-free. Clear, simple language helps employees understand their options, making them more likely to use their benefits.

For example, if you’re planning to launch a COE program for surgical care, the headline should read, “Get your knee replacement for free: At a facility close to home.” Get right to the point and explain the value proposition.

Our approach is to create this idea of always-on benefits. And what that means is that every month we create these digital slides that go up on our TVs around all of our offices that are really bite-sized. We get to be a little irreverent, a little bit funny with it.”

– **Sara Richards**,  
Director of Benefits

# Deploy Product Marketing Principles

HR leaders need to think like marketers when promoting health benefits. It's not enough to simply offer great benefits. You have to actively communicate their value in a way that grabs attention and speaks to employee needs and concerns.

Think of your benefits package as a "product" and apply strategic marketing tactics to boost awareness, engagement and adoption.



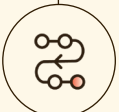
## Take a customer-centric approach

Treat employees as your customers. Use surveys and focus groups to understand their needs and pain points regarding healthcare benefits.



## Use clear positioning and messaging

Craft simple messages that highlight the tangible value of the benefit. Rather than listing coverage details, communicate the real-world impact (e.g., Get free surgical care with your Lantern benefits).



## Develop a go-to-market strategy

Use multiple channels to introduce and promote the benefit throughout the year, not just during open enrollment and Q1.



## Sell the competitive difference

Highlight what makes the benefit stand out, such as affordable cancer care or free and low-cost surgeries.



## Develop enablement resources

Equip department managers and executive leaders with FAQs, training and collateral to help them confidently discuss benefits with employees.



## Measure engagement

Track enrollment rates, employee feedback and engagement stats to see what's working and where you can improve. Use these insights to inform future communication efforts.

If you need assistance developing a go-to-market strategy, don't hesitate to reach out to your organization's marketing team to brainstorm ideas.

# Leverage Data-driven Personalization and Segmentation

By using data to understand different employee needs and preferences, employers can tailor messages to specific groups—whether it’s new hires, spouses or employees.

For example, if you notice multiple CPT codes in your claims data for musculoskeletal diagnoses, it tells you a high number of workers are dealing with sore joints or back pain and would benefit from proactive outreach reminding them of their options.

An integrated COE program can then connect the employee with a top-quality surgeon who can assess whether the employee should move forward with a procedure, or determine if less-invasive solutions, like physical therapy, may be more beneficial.

# Follow Behavioral Science Principles for Engagement

While it sounds like something out of the movies, employers can lean on behavioral science to make employee benefit promotions more engaging and easier to use.

Simple strategies—like nudging employees with timely reminders, framing benefits in a way that highlights immediate value and using social proof to show how others are benefiting—can drive employees to action.

Workers are more likely to engage when information feels relevant, decisions feel effortless and small incentives fuel motivation. By applying these principles, employers can turn benefits from something employees overlook into something they actually use and appreciate.



# Share Employee Testimonials and Success Stories

Employees may be skeptical of benefits like free surgeries and cancer care, but learning about a positive experience directly from colleagues builds credibility. Testimonials reflect the real-life, tangible use of benefits, not corporate messaging.

“The message will resonate so much more from a peer, especially if they can personalize it and say ‘Hey, team, I went and I used this service and here’s how it impacted me.’ Stories are inherently compelling and memorable, helping employees connect emotionally with the individuals and services,” Fish says.

Personal stories also simplify complex benefits by focusing on practical examples that help employees see how the benefits could meet their own needs.



## The Role of a Strong Partner Ecosystem

Partner with solutions that integrate with your existing ecosystem and help support your promotional efforts. COEs can supply educational materials or a thematic content calendar, answer employee questions and even participate in webinars or lunch and learns to build trust and drive engagement.

Promoting similar employee benefits together can also raise awareness and increase utilization. For example, if your organization offers benefits to address orthopedic injuries, like a digital physical therapy program and a specialty care COE program, promote the benefits together and explain how they complement each other.

*Even better: Encourage vendors to work together and cross-promote similar benefits.*

Nothing sells Lantern like word of mouth. It's just spread like wildfire."

– **Kim Baker**,  
Senior Advisor, Health and  
Welfare Benefits, Phillips 66

## Myriam's Story

Lantern member Myriam P. knew her husband Juan needed a procedure to help with his sleep apnea. Before she found out her company was getting Lantern, her family had to save and budget carefully to afford the procedure.

But when Myriam talked with an HR teammate about Juan's situation, she learned that Lantern was available as part of her benefits starting that January. Access to Lantern meant her husband could have the procedure he needed practically for free.

"The coverage was just incredible," Myriam says. "We could not believe it at first."

After Juan's great experience using Lantern, Myriam takes any opportunity to encourage her co-workers and their families to call Lantern first if they need a procedure.

"The way Lantern worked was how you would want insurance to work," Myriam says. "For the first time since I've had insurance, something worked how you would want it to. It was so easy and so turnkey."

# Part 2: COE-Specific Considerations

Effectively communicating a COE program requires a unique approach, as it's not typically a benefit employees use on a regular basis. Some employees may never need the benefit, and that's okay, but they need to know it exists should a need arise.

Employers should deploy an omnichannel engagement strategy focused on specific employee needs and follow a year-round cadence to keep the benefit top of mind.

**Key benefits of promoting a COE program include:**

- Higher utilization
- More savings and ROI
- Cost optimization for common procedures
- Better health outcomes
- Enhanced employee satisfaction and retention

*As such, Lantern has identified key levers that drive employee utilization and help our clients achieve a 10x increase in savings.*

## The Role of Plan Design

The way you structure your COE program directly impacts its success, from employee engagement to health outcomes and ROI. The good news is employers have the flexibility to design plans to best meet the needs of their workforce.

### Voluntary vs. Involuntary Utilization

One of the top considerations is whether to make a COE benefit completely voluntary or require employees to use the COE for surgical care, cancer care, infusions and more.

Voluntary may seem like the more appealing option for employees as it signals choice, but it comes with some drawbacks. Notably, employees will often seek care in the traditional healthcare system, bypassing the high-quality providers, personal care navigation and savings that come from COE utilization.

Requiring members to use the COE for specific procedures, including bariatric, orthopedic and spinal, ensures employees see top-rated, hand-picked providers, and delivers tangible cost savings.

We've won everybody over. Once they go to a Lantern surgeon and have the experience, the feedback comes back really positive."

– Dawn Beaudin,  
VP of Benefits, Hyatt Hotels

## Requiring Employees to Use a COE Saves Money

Independent COE solutions are uniquely positioned to negotiate directly with surgeons, oncologists and other medical professionals to ensure the best prices—typically 130% of Medicare prices — dramatically lowering the total cost of care.

Whereas in the traditional market, carriers base their rates on the list price for procedures as determined by the insurance industry, often charging 250% to 300% of the Medicare rate.

Lantern data shows employers who require employees to use their COE for at least three conditions save an average of \$50 per employee per month versus \$10 PEPM in the voluntary model.

When it comes to promotions, make sure to highlight the real-life benefits and explain how the requirement means employees will see top-rated providers, save money and have an all-around better experience.

## The Role of Incentives

COE programs also give employers the flexibility to determine pricing structures and design incentive plans to boost employee engagement.

Incentive plans allow employers to steer members toward the COE by making the experience more cost-effective and beneficial. Many employers waive all fees for surgeries, infusions and cancer care to remove cost barriers for workers, while also covering travel and lodging expenses.

This can be a game changer for employees who desperately need care, as one study found over a quarter of U.S. adults reported [skipping needed care](#) due to cost.

Promoting incentives for engaging with a COE program is often the most effective method for driving engagement, so make sure to make them a main component of all communications.



## The Role of a Strong COE Network

Insurance-sponsored COEs are generally located along the coasts and in large population centers, making them convenient for some, but out of reach for many. Patients end up needing to travel long distances—sometimes get on an airplane—just to visit a specialist.

Long travel times to a health center not only disincentivize employees from seeking care, but they also lower engagement and negatively impact potential savings. Our data shows employees are 5x more likely to use a COE if they can drive to their care.

The facility-led model also reduces the pool of high-quality providers, because not all surgeons or oncologists in a facility operate at the same level. In fact, one-third of surgeons in any given market lack board certification.

When vetting providers, Lantern considers:

- Procedure volume
- Surgical safety rates
- Readmission rates
- Frequency of malpractice suits

The network approach flips the script by partnering directly with providers, not facilities. At Lantern, we vet providers at the individual level to ensure quality and we only work with board-certified and fellowship-trained providers. This brings our surgical complication rate below 1%, versus 8%–15% in the traditional network.

Lantern’s Network of Excellence is 5x larger than any competitor because we partner with community hospitals, ambulatory surgical centers, teaching hospitals and more, to expand access coast to coast across 725+ facilities.

By bringing care closer to home, 98% members live within a day’s drive to a COE, while 81% of members live within 50 miles of a specialist.

COE promotions should focus on convenience and the ability to access care close to home, while spotlighting how employees only see the best surgeons, oncologists and specialists.

## 6 Promotion Pitfalls to Avoid

1. Promoting benefits only during open enrollment or Q1
2. Listing benefits without explaining the value proposition
3. Overloading employees with too much info at once
4. Relying on a singular communication channel
5. Using jargon or complex language
6. Burying the lead



## The Role of Care Advocates

Facing surgery or a cancer diagnosis is already overwhelming and costly, but patients also have to navigate the complicated healthcare system. Many don’t know where to start. That’s where a Care Advocate steps in.

With Lantern, members are quickly paired with a Care Advocate who can provide personalized guidance, helping patients understand their benefits, treatment options and next steps. Care Advocates help Lantern members secure specialist appointments 21 days faster on average than the industry standard.

Advocates do more than just provide guidance—they take action. They schedule doctor appointments, coordinate specialist referrals and handle paperwork, so employees don’t have to. If an insurance claim gets denied or a bill doesn’t make sense, they step in to resolve appeals and answer billing questions.

The ultimate goal of the Care Advocate is to provide a white-glove experience and remove barriers so patients can focus on their health instead of stressing over logistics. Promotions should highlight how employees will have support at every step of the process.

# Part 3: Resources for Benefits Leaders

Putting all of your eggs in the open enrollment basket or failing to clearly explain the value proposition can set your COE up for failure. Remember, consistent and clear promotions are key.

To ensure your promotions hit the mark, use the Benefits Engagement Scorecard to measure current efforts versus best practices. Then, streamline your efforts with the Promotion Checklist, which outlines key steps to maximize engagement. These tools will help you create a tailored benefits promotion plan that resonates with your employees and produces real results.

**Add your score below: if your current practice matches the best practice in each engagement area, give yourself 1 point. If it doesn't, 0 points. Aim for 7-9 points.**

Engagement	Current Practice	Best Practice
Cost Share		Employer waives all fees or coinsurance to access COE services.
Mandatory Procedures		Members must utilize the COE for a minimum of three procedure categories.
ID Cards		Members receive a branded ID card at open enrollment.
Promotion Channels		Employer deploys an omnichannel communications strategy using the most impactful tools.
Personalized Outreach		Employer analyzes claims data to determine employee needs and tailor promotions accordingly.
Emails on Eligibility File		Employer provides COE partner with eligible employee emails prior to launch.
Events		Employer holds regular events to promote COE benefits. Can include vendor-led events.
Partner Distributed Comms		Employer allows COE partner to communicate with employees directly.
Success Stories and Testimonials		Employer promotes employee testimonials and incentivizes employees to share their experiences.
<b>Engagement Score</b>		

# COE Promotions Checklist

Employees may not know what a COE is, let alone how to use it. The right promotions and cadence will not only help employees understand their benefits, but drive them to engage.

## Promote your COE alongside complementary benefits

For example, if you have a partner for virtual physical therapy, talk about it alongside your surgery COE.

## Consider seasonal benefits messaging

January is a great time to share communications about all your benefits. Year-round promotions are helpful, too. Take advantage of awareness months, like heart health month in February and Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October, to highlight relevant benefits.

## Educate your leadership team

Ensure managers, directors and team leaders know about the COE benefits. Encourage them to share information about benefits with their teams—and to share their experiences using it if they feel comfortable doing so.

## Share testimonials with your team

Personal stories are compelling. Ask a team member who has used the COE to talk about the experience and savings. This could be at a live event or shared through an all-company video or email.

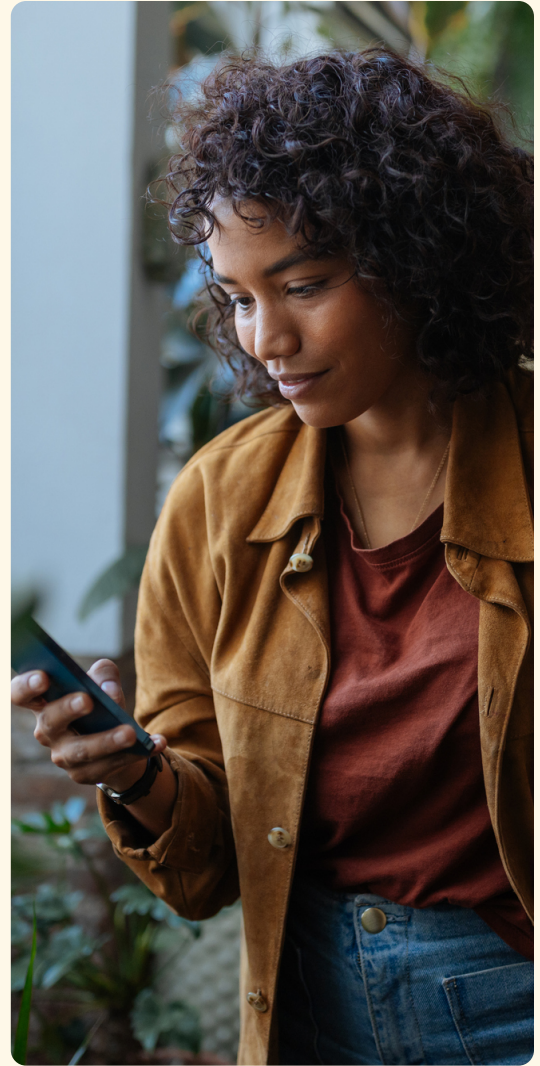
## Consider recording your own video

Short-form videos are popular and engaging. Making a short video about your benefits can raise awareness. Lantern clients have access to a video library of testimonials you can use to raise awareness.

## Use all the channels available

Company newsletters, intranet sites, internal messaging systems, posters for break rooms and in-office digital slides all are great opportunities to talk about your COE. If you're a Lantern client, talk with your team about ready-made resources to make planning easier.

When employees understand what's available, they make smarter choices, stay healthier and even help lower costs. But there's no one-size-fits-all approach. The best way to promote benefits depends on your workforce—who they are, how they communicate and what matters most to them.



Want to learn more about how Lantern supports your benefits communication strategy to drive 5-10X better utilization compared to other solutions?

[\*\*Get in touch with us.\*\*](#)



## About Lantern

Lantern is the specialty care platform connecting people with the best care when they need it most. By curating a Network of Excellence comprised of the nation's top specialists for surgery, cancer care, infusions and more, Lantern delivers excellent care with significant cost savings to employers and their workforces. Lantern also pairs members with a dedicated care team, including Care Advocates and nurses, for the entirety of their care journey, helping them get back to good health, back to their families and back to work. With convenient access to specialists nationwide, Lantern means quality care is within driving distance for most. Lantern is trusted by the nation's largest employers to deliver care to more than 6 million members across the country.

Learn more about us at [lanterncare.com](https://lanterncare.com).

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