

## PLOT POINTS

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# Voluntary products in a COVID-19 world

**AS COVID-19 CONTINUES** to change the benefits landscape, employers anticipate continuing to make changes to their benefits packages. Eastbridge research found that, as a result of COVID-19 changes, almost a third of employers—a percentage similar to that reported in 2018—are planning to add new voluntary benefits and/or move employer-paid products to voluntary this year.

Notably, more employers are considering dropping one or more benefits completely in 2020, suggesting some education may be needed on the continued value of offering particular benefits. On the other hand, more than half of the same group of employers predicted that COVID-19 would increase employee enrollment in voluntary programs, so most employers already understand that employees need voluntary insurance products now more than ever.

Many carriers have adjusted quickly to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well. In a recent Eastbridge survey, close to half of carriers said they are making product modifications due to COVID-19, with another 15% already having plans in the market that cover COVID-19 related events.

When evaluating a carrier's products and benefits, here are a few examples of what to look for now that employers and employees are more attuned to their additional coverage needs in and after the pandemic:

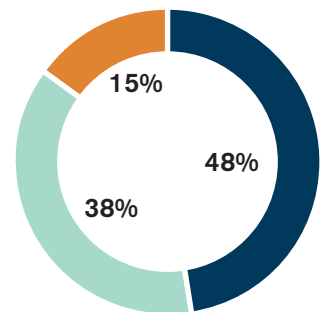
- Hospital indemnity/accident plans that cover COVID-19 as any other illness.
- Critical illness coverage of COVID-19

diagnosis or acute respiratory distress syndrome as part of infectious disease coverage.

- Wellness benefits covering COVID-19 tests/immunizations.
- Non-traditional benefits like telemedicine or teledentistry coverage for their dental plans, mental health benefits, EAP enhancements, quarantine coverage, etc.

In summary, as you are discussing voluntary product strategy with your clients in the context of a COVID-19 world, make sure you have expanded your review criteria of both traditional benefits (e.g., does your critical illness plan cover infectious diseases?) and non-traditional benefits (e.g., are telemedicine visits covered?). Employer and employee product expectations are changing, so it's important to be fully aware of what's available in the market.

### Product changes made or anticipated



- Yes
- No, none of our plans cover COVID-19
- No, our plans already cover COVID-19

### Percent of benefit managers anticipating benefit changes due to COVID-19

Anticipated benefit change	Percent
Add a new voluntary (employee-pay-all) benefit	18%
Move one or more employer-paid benefits to a voluntary basis	13%
Shift more costs of group plans (other than medical) to employees	15%
Add a new employer-paid or partially employer-paid benefit	14%
Drop one or more benefits completely	13%
No benefit changes planned	56%

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