



Updates from the September PEEHIP Board of Control Meeting

As reported in the September *Advisor*, Medicare Advantage Prescription Drug (MAPD) plans, like PEEHIP's, will experience higher cost and less funding in 2025 than previously expected. The higher cost comes from a large percentage of total drug cost shifting from the federal government to plans as a result of new drug payment rules in the Inflation Reduction Act. The lesser funding comes from the 2025 Final Notice from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), which provided less than expected funding for Medicare Advantage plans in 2025. These two factors will increase PEEHIP's cost for its MAPD program by \$152 million in 2025. This dramatic increase in cost significantly contributes to an overall plan funding shortfall in fiscal year 2026.

These federal changes to Medicare Advantage funding and Part D drug payments are much larger in scale than is typically seen year over year in these federal programs. The CMS Final Notice providing 2025 federal funding was just released in April 2024, providing limited time for PEEHIP and UnitedHealthcare® to evaluate and strategize around the funding changes.

Additionally, despite its passage in August 2022, the Inflation Reduction Act will not implement its dramatic overhaul of Part D payment rules until 2025. This major change necessitated a highly complex and extensive analysis by industry experts nationwide to quantify redistributed cost for plans like PEEHIP. Furthermore, a separate funding piece called the Direct Subsidy, which provides upfront funding to plans for Part D drug cost, is updated annually and released around August each year. Due to the implementation in 2025 of the new drug payment rules, the Direct Subsidy was expected to be a much more meaningful

amount this year than in previous years. Because this funding piece was so crucial to budgets, plans like PEEHIP needed to have this number finalized prior to making strategic financial adjustments. The Direct Subsidy for 2025 is now known; therefore, overall cost evaluations for 2025 have finally become clearer.

To address these funding challenges, the PEEHIP Board, in its September meeting, approved two strategies. First, PEEHIP will increase its legislative request for its employer contribution rate from \$800 per employee per month to \$904 per employee per month for fiscal year 2026. These legislative requests are budgeted one year in advance, so the fiscal year 2025 employer contribution rate has already been approved at \$800 per employee per month. This increase would provide an additional \$130 million to the plan for fiscal year 2026.

Second, given the extraordinary circumstances and limited timeline around these changes to MAPD, the Board approved a transfer from the Alabama Retired Education Employees' Healthcare Trust as needed up to \$118.9 million in fiscal year 2026. The law allows a withdrawal from the Trust up to 10% of the fair market value as the previous fiscal year end, and Retiree Trust monies can only be used to pay for PEEHIP retiree benefits. This would be the third transfer from the Retiree Trust since its inception.

For 2025, there will be no changes to PEEHIP member premiums, copays, or any other member cost-sharing pieces of PEEHIP benefits.

PEEHIP will continue to work with its business partners and other industry leaders to discover the best path forward to provide exceptional benefits at the lowest cost to all its members. ●

Let's Get Prepared for Flu Season

While the seasonal flu virus can be detected year-round in the United States, most flu viruses are circulated in the fall and winter. Usually, flu activity begins increasing in October, with peak flu activity running from December through February.¹

The flu can be very serious. It infects the nose, throat, and sometimes the lungs. Illnesses caused by the flu can range from mild to severe and even can cause death. One of the best ways to avoid the flu and its related complications is to get a flu shot.²

Additionally, good health habits like avoiding close contact with people who are sick, covering your cough, and washing your hands often can help stop the spread and prevent not only the flu but other respiratory illnesses.³

People can get sick with the flu at any age, but school-aged children are a group with a higher likelihood of developing symptoms from the flu. According to the CDC, children younger than 18 are more than twice as likely to develop symptoms from the flu virus compared to adults 65 and older. Therefore, students, parents, and educators are all encouraged to get the flu vaccine every year. September and October are generally considered good months to obtain the flu vaccine. For kids, teachers, or others in the education community who become sick with the flu, the CDC recommends staying home at least 24 hours after no longer having

a fever without using fever-reducing medicine.⁴

To help you and those around you stay healthy, your PEEHIP benefits allow you to receive your flu vaccine via a variety of different options:

- ◆ Your doctor's office
- ◆ Your local pharmacy
- ◆ The Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH).

To see a listing of available and upcoming flu shot clinics offered by ADPH, please visit <https://dph1.adph.state.al.us/PublicCal/>.

There is no additional cost or copay for any of the flu shot options. **Please remember to bring your PEEHIP ID card to whichever location you choose for your vaccine. Members covered under the PEEHIP UnitedHealthcare® Group Medicare Advantage (PPO) Plan: Be sure to show your UnitedHealthcare® ID card at the time of getting a flu shot from ADPH, your doctor, or your pharmacy.**

Contact your network pharmacy in advance to inquire about flu vaccine availability, age restrictions, and current vaccination schedules. Also, don't forget to present your member ID card to the pharmacist. Vaccines at a local participating pharmacy typically don't require an appointment and are often quicker to get than those administered by a physician. Make a plan to get your flu vaccine today. ●

¹<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/season/index.html>

²<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/keyfacts.htm>

³<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/school-business/index.html>

⁴<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/school/guidance.htm>

Wellness Screening Deadline

The August 31 deadline to get a wellness screening and earn a waiver of the \$50 monthly wellness premium has passed. If you did not get your screening, you are **not** locked into incurring the wellness premium all plan year. Make plans to get a wellness screening at your first opportunity and you will earn the waiver prospectively for the remainder of the plan year.

The Alabama Department of Public Health (ADPH) offers free screenings at PEEHIP worksite locations and county health departments. To view the availability schedule, visit <https://dph1.adph.state.al.us/publiccal/>.

Screenings are available from your primary health-care provider. Bring a PEEHIP HEALTHCARE PROVIDER SCREENING FORM for your provider to complete and submit by mail or fax to the ADPH. The form can be found at rsa-al.gov/peehip/wellness/.

Screenings are available at participating pharmacies all over the state. To see a list of participating pharmacies, visit rsa-al.gov/peehip/wellness/ or call Blue Cross and Blue Shield at 800.327.3994. If you choose to get your screening at a pharmacy, an appointment may be required. ●

Medicare-Eligible PEEHIP Members

The information below pertains to Medicare-eligible PEEHIP retirees or Medicare-eligible dependents of PEEHIP retirees. For more information, visit rsa-al.gov/peehip/retirees/.



How to Lower Your Risk of Falling

Small changes can help prevent the big negative impact that is often associated with falling. One in four older adults will fall each year.¹ These falls can result in merely a bruised elbow or sore ankle. But too often, they can cause major issues such as severe pain, debilitating disability, and loss of independence. That's why doing everything you can to prevent falling is so important. Fortunately, there are many ways to do just that.

Safety Tips Around the House

Falling does not need to be part of aging. Making some basic improvements around your home can go a long way in helping you maintain the independent life-style you enjoy. Use this list to survey your living environment:

- ◆ Closets/Attics: Avoid climbing and reaching up to high shelves. Have a sure-footed friend or family member help make sure your everyday items are low enough for you to reach.
- ◆ Outside: Only use stepladders that are steady and have a handrail at the top. Always have someone stand next to the ladder. Don't do yardwork without telling someone where you will be.
- ◆ Bedroom: Use a night light. Check the floor for electric cords and don't let clothing or bedding accumulate.
- ◆ Kitchen: Clean up spills right away and avoid any cleaning products that create slippery surfaces.
- ◆ Bathroom: Install grab bars by the shower and toilet and place nonskid mats in the shower and bathtub.
- ◆ Living room: Any carpets and area rugs should be removed or strongly secured to the floor. High-traffic areas should be free of furniture, including smaller items such as plant stands.

- ◆ Stairs: Wood stairs can be slippery, so wear shoes with rubber soles or socks with grippy bottoms. Make sure all handrails are sturdy and sufficiently weight-bearing, or install carpet.
- ◆ Hallways: Keep walkways lit at night.
- ◆ Pets: Our furry friends can get underfoot, creating a tripping hazard. Put a bell on your pet's collar so you know when they are nearby. Keep water and food bowls tucked away and watch for toys on the floor.

Take Control of Your Risk Factors

You can make a big impact on your risk of falling with these simple personal-care steps:

- ◆ Stay active. Work on improving your balance, flexibility, and strength with at-home exercises. As part of your PEEHIP UnitedHealthcare® Group Medicare Advantage Plan, you have access to the Renew Active® fitness program.
- How to find your unique Renew Active® confirmation code:**
1. Sign in or register on your plan website at retiree.uhc.com/PEEHIP
 2. Click **Health & Wellness**
 3. Look for **Renew Active®**
 4. Your **Renew Active® Confirmation Code** will start with a letter, followed by 9 digits
 5. If you are unable to log in to your plan website or if you have any questions, please call UnitedHealthcare® at 877.298.2341, TTY 711, 8 a.m. – 8 p.m., Monday – Friday.
- ◆ Talk to your doctor about the side effects of your medications, as well as changes in your balance, walking ability, or concerns with falling.
 - ◆ Schedule vision and hearing checks.
 - ◆ Get enough calcium to help with bone strength. Ask your doctor what amount is right for you.
 - ◆ Schedule a bone density test to measure your bone strength. It is a painless scan of your body and typically takes just 15 minutes. ●

¹Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024). *Facts about Falls*.

UnitedHealthcare® Hearing

Your hearing health is part of your overall health

Thank you for being a member of the PEEHIP UnitedHealthcare® Group Medicare Advantage (PPO) Plan. To make the most of your benefit, discover all that UnitedHealthcare® Hearing offers with savings up to 50% off a wide selection of hearing aids and services.

Better hearing starts here

Treating hearing loss may help you rediscover parts of your life that may have felt missing – including engaging in daily activities and staying connected to the people you love. You will also support your long-term health and can potentially reduce the risk of diseases such as dementia.¹ Getting a professional hearing test is an important first step in taking care of your hearing. If you already have hearing aids, have them evaluated to make sure they are the right devices for you. Both services are covered at no cost by your PEEHIP UnitedHealthcare® Medicare Advantage Plan and can help you protect your hearing as well as your overall health.

Good-to-know details

- ◆ Receive a no-cost hearing exam and consultation.
- ◆ You have 60 days to try out hearing aids purchased from a provider.
- ◆ Your plan includes a 3-year extended warranty for repairs and a one-time loss or damage replacement.²
- ◆ Schedule up to three follow-up visits at no cost,³ with additional support available.

Get started today

Contact UnitedHealthcare® Hearing to request an initial hearing exam and consultation. Treat hearing loss and protect your hearing health.

- ◆ Call 866.445.2071, TTY 711, to request an appointment. Be sure to mention you are a PEEHIP UnitedHealthcare® Group Medicare Advantage Plan member when you call to request your appointment.



- ◆ Your provider will help you find the perfect solution. At your consultation and exam, your provider will assess your hearing and provide a personalized recommendation. They will be able to answer any questions you may have.
- ◆ Learn more about your hearing health at uhchearing.com/retiree. ●

¹Journal of the American Medical Association. (2023). *Hearing Loss and Dementia Prevalence in Older Adults in the US*.

²One-time professional fee may apply.

³Hearing aids purchased in the silver technology level will receive one follow-up visit.

Benefits, features, and/or devices vary by plan/area. Limitations, exclusions, and/or network restrictions may apply.