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**EMPLOYEES BENEFITS COUNCIL**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Friday, August 19, 2011

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Discounted Health Plans Available for 2012

State's Benefits Office Makes Big Push for Wellness

OKLAHOMA CITY – This fall, for the first time ever, state employees will be able to choose a health plan with a discounted premium simply by taking one small step toward better health.

Today the Employees Benefits Council (EBC) announced rates and details about HMO, dental and vision plans that will be available to Oklahoma's state employees and their families in 2012.

The new health plans unveiled today are called "Wellness Alternative Plus" plans and will come from the three available HMOs: CommunityCare, GlobalHealth, and UnitedHealthcare. The new plans will be designed exactly like their respective Alternative plans, but with a premium that costs 25 dollars less per month (\$300 per year). To be eligible for the discounted rate, state employees will be required to complete a quick and simple online Health Risk Assessment, a part of the reinvented OKHealth Wellness Program that will debut in October.

"We're very excited about these new plans from our existing health carriers," EBC Executive Director Philip K. Kraft said. "These discounted rates will get many more state employees familiar with the OKHealth Wellness Program and all the resources it provides toward better health. As the state's largest employer group, we simply must improve our overall health in order to control our healthcare costs. In fact, our goal is to be the healthiest employer group in the nation. Prevention truly is cheaper than a cure."

For Plan Year 2012, state employees and their families can also choose health coverage from HealthChoice, the state's self-insured indemnity plans. The most popular HealthChoice plans will include an incentive to be tobacco free. Smokers and other tobacco users will pay higher annual deductibles.

EBC's contract negotiations resulted in an increase of 6.26 percent in the overall employer contribution, called the benefit allowance. The increase is well below the 10-year trend of 18-percent increases per year. It is important to note state law mandates that EBC calculate the benefit allowance based on the average of the highest-cost HMO and HealthChoice health plans. The calculation also includes an average of the dental plans' costs, plus the basic life insurance and disability premiums and 75 percent of dependents' health costs. The benefit allowance formula is designed to help offset increases in premiums. In 2012, employees will get an additional 37 dollars or more per month.

"The Council carefully considers how the decisions we make affect agencies' budgets," Council Chairman Bryce Fair said. "However, our job is to give state employees and their families a comprehensive and competitive benefits package. Last year, circumstances allowed us to approve rates that kept the benefit allowance from increasing. Although there will be an increase for 2012, we are pleased that it will be less than the increase many agencies were expecting."

Overall HMO rates, which include the Standard, Alternative and Wellness Alternative Plus plans, went up an average of 8.27 percent, which is below the national average increase of nearly 11 percent projected by Gallagher Benefit Services, Inc. In addition, the HMO plans have no increased copays, no reduced levels of coverage or other forms of cost-shifting to employees.

In other business Friday, the Council awarded a new contract to ASI (Association & Society Insurance) Corp. for its TRICARE supplement. Council members also voted in favor of renewing contracts with the existing vision insurance companies, Humana, Primary Vision Care Services, Superior Vision Services, United HealthCare Vision, and Vision Service Plan, along with current dental insurance carriers Assurant, CIGNA Incorporated and Delta Dental of Oklahoma. EBC also offers the state's self-insured HealthChoice dental plan.

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