



USI Benefits Benchmarking Study

2026 Benefit Trends and Insights



National Findings

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Market Overview & 2026 Cost Drivers

Why is Benchmarking Important?

Employers are working to plant the right seeds — balancing rising benefit costs with growing employee expectations. Plan sponsors want to know:

- How do our benefit offerings stack up against the competition?
- What do employees value?
- Do our benefits address our main cost drivers?
- Are we effectively communicating to our members?

To drive informed decision-making, USI actuaries benchmark plan design with the related actuarial value of out-of-pocket costs and employee contributions.

2026 Cost Drivers

Several factors contributed to an unexpected jump in costs this year:



Network Contracts

Renegotiated to account for higher provider wages and aggressive hospital pricing.



Behavioral Health

Usage up significantly with longer treatment durations and higher per-episode costs.



Claim Volume

Overall claims volume increased; large claims costs up significantly. AI may be driving upcoding.



Pharmacy

Costs rising from GLP-1 demand, new-to-market medications, and specialty drugs.

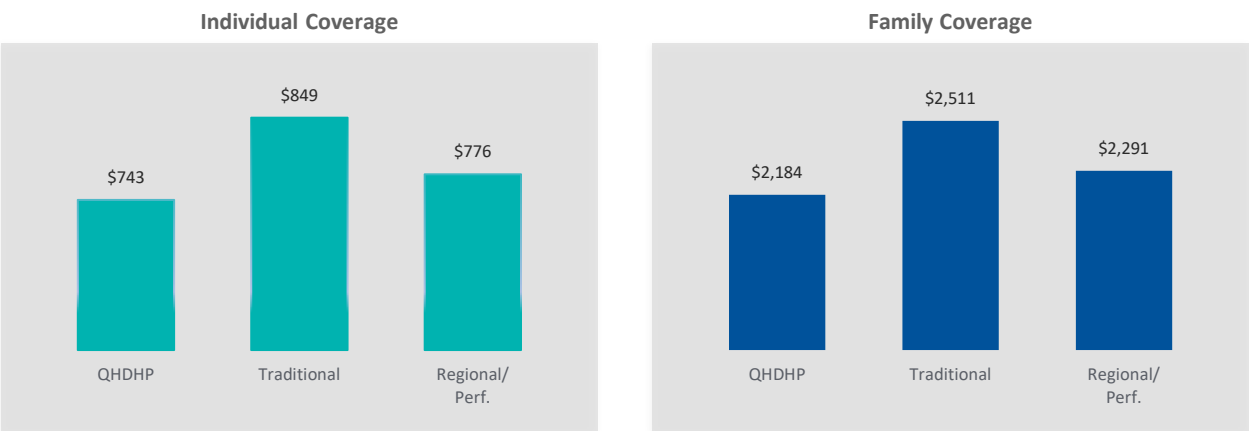
Healthcare spending in the U.S. is expected to grow to **5.7% in 2026 to \$5.9 trillion**, and is projected to reach **nearly \$9 trillion by 2033.**¹

¹ Peterson-KFF Health System Tracker, How much is health spending expected to grow?

Cost of Coverage

Premiums reflect total plan costs, which are shaped by plan design, claims experience, pricing, and market dynamics. Payroll contributions heavily influence employees' perception of the benefit and drive migration from one plan to another.

Premium – Average Monthly Total Cost of Coverage by Plan Type



Employee Payroll Contribution – Avg. Monthly Deduction by Plan Type



Plan Premiums

Healthcare premiums continued to rise across all plan types in 2026, with average increases in the 7%-8% range. Contrast that with 6%-6.5% increases seen in the prior year, this accelerating growth reflects inflationary pressures and rising medical costs, prompting employers to rethink benefit strategies as affordability remains a concern.

Payroll Contributions

Employee contributions are also trending upward: contributions in 2026 rose at a similar rate as overall premium changes, 7%-8%, compared to average increases of less than 3% in the prior year. This indicates a shift toward greater cost-sharing, suggesting employers are passing on a larger share of the rising expense to their employees.

QHDHP = Qualified High-Deductible Plans;
Traditional = Broad Network PPO Type Plans;
Regional/Performance = Regional, High Performance, or Tiered Network Plans

Trends in Plan Strategy

Population Health Management

Rising costs driven by chronic conditions pose a direct risk to employer financial models. A custom plan analysis uncovers primary cost drivers and outlines strategies to reduce employer spend.



Physician Engagement

Increase primary care and recommended screenings with meaningful incentives

28%

Offering direct or virtual primary care



Cancer Care Management

Improve health outcomes and reduce impact of catastrophic claims

7%

Encouraging centers of excellence



Diabetes Management

Reduce costly complications by aligning plan design with treatment strategies

21%

Higher risk of heart attack or stroke amongst members with diabetes

Top Health Risks by Industry

As risk patterns tend to vary by industry, segmenting benchmarking allows employers to tailor solutions to their workforce.

	Cardiovascular	Diabetes	Musculoskeletal	Behavioral Health	Cancer
Construction	✓		✓		✓
Education	✓		✓		✓
Healthcare		✓	✓	✓	
Manufacturing	✓				✓
Public Entity	✓			✓	✓
Nonprofit		✓	✓	✓	
Transportation	✓	✓	✓		✓

This list includes several of our largest industry segments and is not inclusive of all the industries we serve, nor does this include all of the industry-specific comorbidities identified by USI's Population Health Management team. USI's 2026 Benchmarking Study compares over 100 industries.

Trends in Plan Strategy

Employee Well-being

Employees suffering from a physical condition as well as depression and/or financial stress can cost 30% to 50% more than those with a physical condition alone.

35%-100%¹

Depression can increase cost of treating chronic conditions

57%²

Of working Americans say finances are the top cause of stress

21%³

Of American adults have a behavioral health condition

The Value of Early Treatment

When depression is present with comorbid conditions, costs are compounded. The savings opportunity of treating depression before it progresses is estimated at 2% to 8% of total medical and drug spend.

Behavioral Health and Financial Well-being

The most successful employers make these programs easy to access, integrated with medical where possible, and relevant to employees' day-to-day lives.



Behavioral Health

Reduce absenteeism and improve productivity through integrated mental health solutions



Lifestyle Modification

Encourage healthier habits and lower long-term risk factors with targeted wellness resources



Financial Wellness

Improve employee engagement and reduce stress by addressing financial literacy and security

27%

With behavioral health solutions

34%

Providing lifestyle modification resources

53%

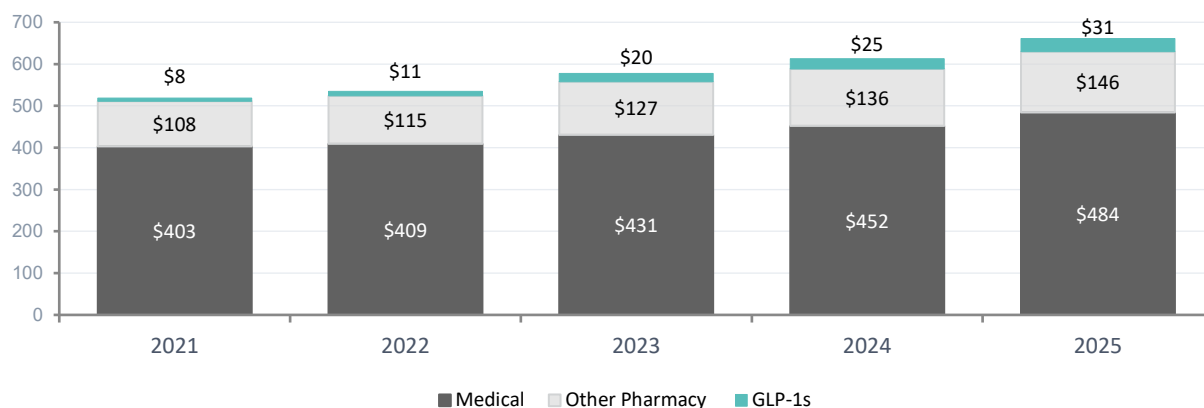
Offering financial wellness resources and training

¹ USI 3D Claims Database; ² PWC, 2023 Employee Financial Wellness Survey; ³ National Alliance on Mental Illness

Prescription Drug Trends

27% average pharmacy share of total claims, up from 22% four years ago.¹

Paid Claims Per Member Per Month (PMPM)



GLP-1 Spending: Employer GLP-1 spending has increased 500%+ since 2019.² GLP-1s now account for up to 15% of total spend for some employer groups.³

Strategies to Control Pharmacy Spend



GLP-1 Management

Understand plan design options. Consider coverage policies and alternative funding for weight-loss prescriptions.



Cell & Gene Therapy

Costs range from \$200K to \$3.5M per dose. Likelihood of high-cost claims increases as more therapies are approved.



Biosimilar Adoption

Plans may save \$1,000 to \$4,000 per fill when members switch to biosimilars. Use formulary customization for adoption.

17%

Covering GLP-1s within the plan

12%

Amended plan documents to exclude some or all gene/cellular therapies

30%-50%

Potential reduction in related rebates shifting savings into upfront pricing

¹ USI 3D Claims Database; ² <https://www.oversight.gov/sites/default/files/documents/reports/2025-12/2025-CAAG-019.pdf>; ³ International Foundation of Employee Benefits Plans

Get a Full Customized Report

A custom benchmarking report helps guide your benefits strategy with tailored insights and actionable recommendations.



Your Health Plan From the Employee Perspective

- Plan design value and offerings
- Payroll contributions
- Total employee cost
- Communication quality



Medical Cost Efficiency and Plan Strategy

- Plan funding method
- Types of plans offered
- Population health management
- Prescription drug strategy



Insights on Additional Benefits

- Dental
- Vision
- Paid time off
- Family leave
- Short-term disability
- Long-term disability
- Life insurance
- Voluntary or worksite benefits
- Retirement readiness strategy
- Financial well-being and education

The USI Benefits Benchmarking Study is the **largest survey** of its kind, with more than 10,000 participating employers. We have, by far, the market's highest participation which enables the **deepest** and **narrowest cuts** of **emerging trend insights** for your relevant peer group. The 2026 survey results are available now.

Benefits and Impact

Benchmarking provides insights and opportunities to make plan design changes and create competitive, market-leading benefits that employees look for from their employer.



Plant

Benchmarking helps you **plant the right foundation** for your benefits strategy — optimizing spend while improving **attraction and retention**.



Nurture

A customized Benefits Benchmarking report helps you **nurture your strategy**, providing a clear roadmap to **guide growth over time**.



Thrive

Forward-looking **strategies** help your organization **thrive**, improving employee satisfaction with more impactful programs.

Participate in USI's 2026 Benefits Benchmarking Study and receive your personalized report

With over 100 industries to compare against, USI's Benefits Benchmarking Study provides a custom report for your organization with recommended solutions to help optimize your employee benefits offering.

[Access Survey Here](#)