

REACTA

Letter to Zenith American Solutions and CTA Employees' Health and Welfare Benefits Trustees August 29, 2024

Zenith American Solutions is approaching its one-year anniversary as Administrator for the CTA Health and Welfare Benefits Trust. Because CTA retirees outnumber active participants in the Trust, some aspects of retiree health and welfare benefits provided by the Trust are different from those provided to active employee participants. For example, the Trust administers a pay-as-you-go life insurance benefit that is offered to CTA employees upon their retirement and with enrollment in Medicare, there are quarterly reimbursements for the Medicare Part B base premium. Also, CTA's Health and Welfare benefits, as provided by collective bargaining agreements with the staff unions, provide for lifetime health benefits for spouses and eligible dependents.

It is no surprise that the transition to Zenith American Solutions from Earhart & Company has experienced its challenges. REACTA feels a responsibility to provide our collective evaluation of Zenith American Solutions to Zenith and the Trustees. This progress report is intended to be constructive, honest, and hopefully will be perceived as encouraging feedback with the goal to improve future services provided by Zenith.

Following are general categories of our overall experience with Zenith and specific recommendations.

Customer Care Center

The initial roll out for the new Anthem enrollment card did not go well. In fact, retirees were left off the original mailing and many had to request Anthem cards multiple times. What should have been a smooth roll out turned out to take weeks to accomplish. It left some retirees unable to see a doctor, as many doctors require an actual card.

The Medicare Part B Affidavit for Reimbursement roll out was problematic. The Customer Care Center was ill equipped to handle this program. Many retirees had to send in their signed affidavit and Medicare cards multiple times yet were still listed as not in compliance. In some cases, the retiree and/or spouse had been listed as not in compliance when both submitted their forms in the same envelope. This should have been handled by one and not multiple departments from start to finish.

The life insurance quarterly billing has also had its problems. The Customer Care Center was ill equipped to handle the initial rollout and the transition to a calendar quarterly billing system. It took many complaints from retirees, the trustees and CTA-HR to finally be able to refer retirees to a real person who could answer specific individual questions.

Trust participants are accustomed to having their concerns addressed promptly and with someone advocating on their behalf. The experience of calling Zenith for help often feels like trying to maneuver through a huge bureaucracy rather than working with an advocate. Whoever responds to an inquiry should be well equipped and knowledgeable about our specific health plan, as it is not a standard Anthem plan and benefits.

Recommendations: The Customer Care Center should receive consistent and ongoing training. Rather than the Customer Service staff tracking down multiple Zenith departments for information, there should be one consolidated site at their fingertips for all Trust participants. The staff should be trained to be an advocate for participants who need assistance.

Trust Communication

Recommendation: When a new program is rolled out there should be an expectation that, in advance, Zenith would clearly communicate any of the upcoming changes. Without such communication, REACTA, the Trustees and CTA-HR all receive complaints and are left to do damage control.

Recommendation: It is understandable that using snail mail may be beneficial in some circumstances, however, in this tech world, the option of having electronic communications would be more efficient and less costly, especially with EOB's, due to the number of pages being mailed, and the frequency of the mailings. REACTA believes that Zenith might have some incorrect addresses or no address for some participants, and it might prove beneficial to cross check databases with BeneSys.

Recommendation: Other than the Customer Care Center staff there is no one assigned to receive complaints or field issues that the Care Center staff cannot address. A "real" person to speak with is essential when participant issues cannot be resolved at the lowest level.

Benefits

Recommendation: Most retiree Trust participants have lifetime health benefits, so there should not be a written end date for coverage as shown on the Zenith participant web page. Even though the end date is regularly extended, it is very confusing when it implies that participants can lose their benefits after a specific date.

Recommendation: Because retirees have the time and enjoy traveling, clarification for coverage when travelling or living out of the country should be clearly communicated to participants.

Eligibility and Enrollment

Recommendation: Upon notification of the death of a retiree, Zenith should contact the retiree's spouse or domestic partner regarding their continuation of health benefits. A surviving spouse/domestic partner should never have their health benefits dropped when a CTA retiree passes.

Recommendation: The Trust should communicate with retirees who are eligible for Medicare with a checklist of steps needed to continue with health benefit coverage.

On the bright side, REACTA has observed positive changes which are appreciated. The turnaround time for the processing of claims has improved. Adding additional Customer Care Center staff has improved the wait time. Also, the Customer Care Center staff are very professional and try to assist even when they don't have sufficient training or know the answers to questions.

It is our hope that the services that Zenith provides will continue to improve and that the information REACTA has provided will be helpful to provide guidance and suggestions.