



Meeting Minutes | Health Care Policy Committee

Wednesday, March 2, 2022 | 10:30 a.m.

202 Arbor Lake Dr., Columbia, SC 29223 | First Floor Conference Room

Minutes Approved June 15, 2022

Board Members Present for All or a Portion of the Meeting: Mr. Calvin Elam, PEBA Board Chairman Joe “Rocky” Pearce, Chairman Alex Shissias, and Mr. John Sowards.

Others Present for All or a Portion of the Meeting: Peggy Boykin, Robby Brown, Phyllis Buie, Sarah Corbett, Denise Hunter, Heather Muller, Laura Smoak, Rob Tester, Stephen Van Camp, and Heather Young from the South Carolina Public Employee Benefit Authority (PEBA); Sara Grace Bailey, Jesse Epting, Dr. Tripp Jennings, Dr. Derick Wenning, and Carmen Wilson from BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina; and Sam Griswold from the State Retiree’s Association of South Carolina.

Others Present for All or a Portion of the Meeting Via Virtual Means: Amber Carter, Jessica Moak, Travis Turner; Angie Warren, and Justin Werner from PEBA; and Marc Kochamba from Medtronic.

I. Call to Order

Chairman Alex Shissias called the PEBA Health Care Policy Committee (Committee) meeting to order at 10:30 a.m., and stated that the public meeting notice was posted in compliance with the Freedom of Information Act.

II. Approval of Meeting Minutes – November 30, 2021

Mr. Calvin Elam made a motion, which was seconded by Mr. John Sowards, and passed unanimously, to approve the minutes from the November 30, 2021, Committee meeting.

III. Election of Committee Vice-Chairman

Mr. Calvin Elam made a motion, which was seconded by Chairman Shissias, and passed unanimously, to nominate Mr. Sowards as the Health Care Policy Committee Vice-Chairman for the remainder of the current term.

IV. Benchmark Review

Mr. Rob Tester, Insurance Policy Director, presented the State Health Plan benchmarking review in which key SHP measures are compared with peer and national benchmarks. Mr. Tester reviewed the SHP enrollment as of March 2022; the SHP growth and expenditure per member to national trends; the SHP contribution rate increases versus the Consumer Price Index growth for medical care; and the 2021 average monthly total premiums.

Mr. Tester also discussed the 2021 average annual deductible; the 2020 average annual gross plan cost per active employee; and the 2022 composite monthly premiums. Mr. Tester stated that the State Health Plan continues to compare favorably to other public and private employers, even with the additional COVID related claims expenses.

Ms. Peggy Boykin, Executive Director, advised the Committee that in both the Governor’s version and the House Ways and Means Committee version of the budget, there would be an 18.1 percent employer only rate increase effective January 1, 2023; and no employee rate increase. Ms. Boykin stated that PEBA had requested \$200 million to replenish the State Health Plan’s cash reserve, but the House Ways and Means Committee budget did not address this request.

V. COVID Update

Mr. Tester introduced Dr. Tripp Jennings, Clinical Innovation Officer, from BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina, to provide an update to his previous presentation on the effects and status of COVID-19 in South Carolina.

Dr. Jennings noted that on March 3, 2021, there were 112,646,459 confirmed COVID cases, and 2,496,485 deaths were reported worldwide. Currently, there have been 435,939,586 cases reported, and 5,951,011 deaths worldwide.

Dr. Jennings reviewed COVID-19 metrics worldwide, and noted that in most countries (including the United States) trends are significantly improving, but cautioned that the danger is not over yet. There are only three counties worldwide that do not have any COVID-19 cases. Dr. Jennings also reviewed COVID-19 metrics in South Carolina, and noted that hospitals are experiencing downward trends and deaths are starting to decline.

Dr. Jennings concluded his presentation by comparing similarities and differences between COVID-19 and the Spanish Influenza from 1918-1921; various COVID treatments; and the reporting and accuracy of self-testing.

VI. An Overview of Long-COVID and Potential impacts

Dr. Jennings introduced Dr. Derick Wenning, Associate Medical Director with Client Services from BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina, to discuss the characteristics of Long-COVID, which is the persistence of symptoms four weeks or more after a COVID diagnosis. Some of the persistent symptoms include chronic fatigue, muscular weakness, shortness of breath, joint pain, headaches, chest pain, anxiety and depression.

Dr. Wenning discussed three different possibilities of what causes Long-COVID including autoimmune conditions, inflammation, and virus persistence/reactivation. Dr. Jennings stated that the causes of Long-COVID are multi-factorial, and are increased by pre-existing conditions and behavioral health conditions. The severity of Long-COVID is not predictable, and risk factors increase for people who have been hospitalized, or over the age of 50. Women are also about two-thirds more likely than men to have Long-COVID related symptoms. 15 percent of patients with Long-COVID have persistent symptoms for over six months.

Dr. Wenning detailed four subtypes of Long-COVID including respiratory, neurocognitive, behavioral health, and dysautonomia. Dr. Jennings stated that 24 percent of patients with acute COVID-19 who were discharged from the hospital reported PTSD, and 22 percent with anxiety and depression. Dr. Wenning advised that vaccination is still the best option to prevent Long-COVID, and the odds of developing Long-COVID are cut in half with vaccinated individuals.

Dr. Wenning concluded his presentation by reporting that there are 1,442,280 COVID-19 surviving cases in South Carolina, and approximately 18-20 percent of those patients have Long-COVID symptoms.

VII. Old Business/Director's Report

Ms. Boykin advised the Committee that the General Assembly suspended the sweep of the State Health Plan into the Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB) trust fund that would normally occur on January 31, 2021, so that any surplus could be retained to pay claims expenses in 2022. Ms. Boykin stated that a proviso was added in the House Ways and Means version of the budget to allow PEBA to suspend the sweep each year going forward if needed during the pandemic.

Ms. Boykin thanked Mr. Tester and PEBA's analytics team, along with BlueCross BlueShield, Express Scripts, and PEBA's actuaries, to provide the General Assembly with accurate claims expenditures to determine necessary premium increases so that future claims can be paid.

Ms. Boykin advised that the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) requested special funding from the General Assembly for a project related to the Social Determinants of Health (SDOH), i.e., non-clinical factors impacting member health. Ms. Boykin stated that PEBA provided the General Assembly with a letter endorsing support of the project.

VIII. Adjournment

There being no further business, and upon a motion by Mr. Elam, which was seconded by Mr. Sowards, and approved unanimously, the Committee meeting adjourned at 12:02 p.m.