



## Comprehensive Benefit Design for Hypertension *Employer Recommendations for Action*

Hypertension (high blood pressure) affects nearly 50% of working-age adults in the U.S., resulting in significant impacts on health and well-being (e.g., cognitive decline, kidney disease), direct costs of care (e.g., hospitalization, physician visits), and indirect costs (absenteeism and presenteeism). This Comprehensive Benefit Design for Hypertension is intended to help employers, as purchasers of health benefits, and stewards of population health, develop and implement well-being and benefit design strategies to prevent, control, and manage the impact of hypertension.

The Comprehensive Benefit Design for Hypertension draws on a wide variety of resources from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Heart Association, and similar organizations that are committed to improving population health and blood pressure control. These, and other resources are listed toward the end of this guide.

### How Employers Can Use this Comprehensive Benefit Design for Hypertension

Employers are encouraged to view the following strategies as a checklist of key interventions to implement for reducing the impact of hypertension: both by reducing the number of individuals with hypertension, and helping to control blood pressure for those diagnosed with this chronic condition. These strategies are intended to improve the health of the workforce and the community, and lower healthcare costs. The Resource List provides additional information and tools to assist employers in implementing these seven strategies.

## Strategy 1: Promote Healthy Lifestyles

### ***Provide lifestyle support programs to prevent and manage hypertension.***

- Offer healthy eating and physical activity programs.
- If onsite vending and/or cafeterias are available, provide low-sodium food choices, and increase the availability of fresh fruits and vegetables with your vendor(s).
- Promote a smoke-free campus and offer smoking cessation programs at zero cost.
- Encourage ways to reduce and limit alcohol consumption through educational campaigns/education.
- Communicate the importance of sleep, and ensure that benefits to diagnose and treat sleep disorders are covered.
- Promote healthy weight by reviewing your weight management programs and resources and include lifestyle support, as well as evidence-based pharmacologic and surgical benefits.
- Promote access to mental health resources and providers to help employees manage anxiety, stress, depression, and other serious concerns, and ensure that benefits to diagnose and treat mental health issues are covered.

Of course, these activities have the potential to prevent or reduce the impact of other chronic illnesses of concern, such as obesity, diabetes, and musculoskeletal impairment.

## Strategy 2: Screening

### ***Conduct blood pressure screenings to identify individuals with undiagnosed (and diagnosed) hypertension.***

- Ensure that blood pressure (BP) measurement is included in health fairs and other health and well-being events.
- Schedule on-site BP or biometric screening events that include BP measurement.
- Ensure that Health Risk Assessments (HRA's) include family history of hypertension and self-reported BP (or include BP measurement).
- Determine how your organization and/or vendors will refer and follow-up on people who screen for elevated blood pressure.
- Encourage establishment of primary care physician relationship.

## Strategy 3: Know Your Data

### ***Track progress over time in hypertension prevalence, medical and pharmacy spend for the HTN population.***

- At least annually, ask your medical and pharmacy carriers to provide data in response to the following questions, or, if you maintain data in house, have the analytics team provide this information:
  - What percentage of the population has been diagnosed with hypertension?
  - Are there differences in hypertension prevalence rates by age group, gender, race/ethnicity, geography or worksite location, tenure at the organization, position (e.g., frontline, back office) co-morbid conditions (e.g., kidney disease, diabetes, pregnancy, mental health issues), or other factors?
  - What proportion of people with diagnosed hypertension have a primary care physician relationship or other usual source of care? How is this being measured?
  - What proportion of people with diagnosed hypertension are on a hypertension medication?
  - What is the adherence rate for those who are being treated with hypertension medication?

### Additional questions to ask your carriers:

- What are your commercial HEDIS rates for hypertension measures, and how do they compare with national benchmarks? [See "NCQA HEDIS blood pressure measures" in Resource List, below]
- What programs do you offer to support hypertension prevention, screening, and control?
- Is it possible to capture blood pressure data in claims?
- What are you doing to foster primary care relationships for people with hypertension?





## Strategy 4: Review Your Benefit Design to Improve Healthcare Access and Quality

**Your covered benefits should help people access hypertension prevention and control services at reasonable or no out-of-pocket cost.**

- Improve financial access to hypertension medications by reducing or waiving out-of-pocket payments (Value-based insurance design, V-BID).
- Provide health plan coverage for blood pressure cuffs to support self-measurement and self-management of hypertension (See Million Hearts Campaign in Resource List).
- Ensure that covered devices are selected based on reliability and accuracy and not just cost by reviewing devices [See AMA in Resource List]
- Engage a pharmacist in reviewing your formulary and overall medication management strategy to ensure that an appropriate range of anti-hypertensive medications are covered, and that tier placement is appropriate to remove financial barriers and foster adherence.



## Strategy 5: Promote Appropriate Care Management

**Work with medical and pharmacy carriers, and potentially additional service vendors to strengthen your hypertension management strategy.**

- Encourage individuals with hypertension to establish a primary care relationship, and monitor rates of primary care utilization for individuals with diagnosed hypertension.
- Ask your carriers how they are monitoring quality of hypertension care at the population, health system, provider, and individual patient levels.
- Ask your carriers what educational programs and materials are available for providers and patients.
- Work with your benefits consultants and medical and pharmacy carriers to obtain measures of anti-hypertensive medication adherence.
- Discuss adherence monitoring and improvement programs (including 90-day supply and mail order availability) for anti-hypertensive medications.
- Implement Medication Therapy Management or Comprehensive Medication Management – individual pharmacist-led counseling to review drug list (prescription and over-the-counter) and dosing, prevent drug interactions and adverse events, and support adherence -- for individuals with hypertension and associated comorbid conditions or risk factors.
- Consider contracting with a care management vendor to provide a hypertension management program.
- Provide access to a self-management smartphone app or point solution.



## Strategy 6: Ensure that Programs are Patient-Centered

**Work to increase employee engagement in health and benefits offerings by meeting individual and sub-population needs.**

- Consider hosting an employee roundtable or focus group to learn more about the current challenges facing the population with hypertension.
- Provide educational materials regarding hypertension management from your health carriers and service vendors, and from national and local resources such as CDC's Division of Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention or the American Heart Association (see Resource List).
- Offer employee-facing health coaching and nutritional counseling services, and encourage use of these services through communications and incentives.
- Review the impact of social determinants of health on hypertension prevalence and management for your workforce, including:
  - Health literacy
  - Food insecurity
  - Financial well-being
  - Toxic stress and trauma
  - Medical and mental health care access
- Develop patient resource groups for individuals with hypertension who would benefit from increased social support.



## Strategy 7: Program Evaluation in a Continuous Quality Improvement Framework

**Referring back to Strategy 3, ensure that you evaluate the impact of your prevention and control efforts and adjust your programs and benefits offerings accordingly.**

- At least annually, review key metrics for program evaluation:
  - Hypertension prevalence (existing and new cases)
  - Hypertension incidence (new cases)
  - Hypertension control
  - Obesity prevalence
  - Incidence rates and costs for Cerebrovascular and Cardiovascular events
  - Overall trends in direct costs [Per employee per month (PEPM) or per year (PEPY)] for general population and population with hypertension
- Consider looking at these key metrics by age group, gender, and race/ethnicity, to identify sub-group differences and determine potential actions to increase health equity with regard to hypertension prevention and control.



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**Surgeon General's Call to Action:** [https://www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure/docs/Surgeon\\_General\\_HTN\\_Control\\_Employers.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure/docs/Surgeon_General_HTN_Control_Employers.pdf)

- The Surgeon General encourages us to make hypertension control a national priority. High blood pressure can be controlled to reduce health risks. Many different groups will need to come together to support the use of proven strategies in every community and for every population group.

**CDC Workplace Health:** <https://www.cdc.gov/workplacehealthpromotion/health-strategies/blood-pressure/index.html>

- The CDC Workplace Health Resource Center (WHRC) is a one-stop shop for workplace health promotion that gives employers resources to create a healthy work environment. It has credible tools and step-by-step resources employers can use to tailor a health promotion program to their unique workplace needs. The blood pressure intervention descriptions on this page include the public health evidence-base for each intervention, details on designing interventions for blood pressure screening and control, and links to examples and resources.

**CDC HTN landing page:** <https://www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure/index.htm>

- The blood pressure intervention descriptions on this page includes information on how to talk with your health care team about how you can manage your blood pressure and lower your risk. Other resources on this page include links to a Hypertension Communications Kit and information on why watching your sodium intake is important for your health.

**CDC HTN management toolkit:** <https://www.cdc.gov/dhdsp/pubs/toolkits/hmp-toolkit/index.htm>

- The Hypertension Management Program (HMP) toolkit is an online interactive training for a team-based, patient-centered, integrated care model. This toolkit was developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Division for Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention (DHDSP) to provide healthcare organizations, including those in resource-constrained settings, with the information and resources to implement the HMP and improve hypertension control among their patients. The goal of the HMP is to improve the quality of patient care and decrease the number of patients with uncontrolled hypertension to improve each patient's overall health and wellbeing.

**National Hypertension Roundtable:** <https://hypertensioncontrol.org/>

- The National Hypertension Control Roundtable (NHCR) is a coalition of public, private, and nonprofit organizations dedicated to eliminating disparities in hypertension control through dialogue, partnership, evidence and innovation. The NHCR prioritizes supporting people in controlling their blood pressure wherever they live, learn, work, play and pray; and equitably advancing patient care to increase hypertension control.

**AHA blood pressure toolkit:** <https://www.heart.org/en/health-topics/high-blood-pressure/high-blood-pressure-toolkit-resources>

- The AHA Blood Pressure Tool Kit will help you learn the correct way to check your blood pressure, provides insight on taking the first step in talking to a healthcare provider through a downloadable discussion guide, provides links to a validated blood pressure device listing, and other resources for patients and health care professionals.

**AMA list of validated blood pressure measurement devices:** <https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/hypertension/bp-monitoring-you-can-count-list-validated-devices-grows>

- The American Medical Association maintains a list of validated measurement devices for self-management of blood pressure.



### **Measure Up Pressure Down provider toolkit to improve hypertension:**

<http://www.measureuppressuredown.com/HCProf/toolkit.pdf>

<http://www.measureuppressuredown.com/>

- Measure Up/Pressure Down was a national campaign to help you address many of the common challenges associated with effectively treating and managing high blood pressure. The American Medical Group Foundation (AMGF) and American Medical Group Association (AMGA) produced a provider toolkit to mobilize doctors, nurses and the entire healthcare team to work together to achieve 80% of their patient population with high blood pressure in control by 2016. In this toolkit, useful tools, tips, and resources have been outlined to help jump-start a hypertension quality improvement initiative in a clinical setting.

### **MillionHearts hypertension resources:** [https://search.usa.gov/search?](https://search.usa.gov/search?query=hypertension&sitelimit=&utf8=%E2%9C%93&affiliate=millionhearts.hhs.gov)

[query=hypertension&sitelimit=&utf8=%E2%9C%93&affiliate=millionhearts.hhs.gov](https://search.usa.gov/search?query=hypertension&sitelimit=&utf8=%E2%9C%93&affiliate=millionhearts.hhs.gov)

- Million Hearts is a national initiative co-led by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). It focuses on implementing a small set of evidence-based priorities and targets that can improve cardiovascular health for all. The hypertension management resources listed on this link includes the Hypertension Control Package which highlights a listing of process improvements that outpatient clinical settings can implement to achieve optimal hypertension control.

### **NCQA HEDIS Blood Pressure Measures:** <https://www.ncqa.org/hedis/measures/controlling-high-blood-pressure/>

- NCQA is the National Committee for Quality Assurance, a national organization focused on performance measurement and improvement. HEDIS is a set of metrics developed by NCQA to examine health plan performance in a standardized manner, so that findings can be compared across plans. Controlling High Blood Pressure is one of these standardized measurement sets, looking at both blood pressure measurement and blood pressure control.

### **University of Michigan V-BID Center:** <https://vbidcenter.org/>

- Value-based Insurance Design (V-BID) seeks to promote high-value service use and discourage low-value service use through benefit design, specifically the out-of-pocket payment structure. Use of high-value hypertension prevention and control services can be increased by decreasing or waiving co-payments or co-insurance, and/or adding them to the first dollar coverage preventive service list (i.e. not subjecting them to deductibles). The V-BID Center has information and case studies on this approach.

### **World Health Organization Guideline for Pharmacologic Treatment of Hypertension in Adults:** <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/344424/9789240033986-eng.pdf>

- A useful resource containing recommendations on appropriate pharmacologic treatment for hypertension, including eligible population, selection of therapy, risk assessment, and monitoring of treatment effectiveness.

### **Academy for Nutrition and Dietetics's resources on HTN which are found here:**

<https://www.eatright.org/search-results?keyword=hypertension&topics=Cardiovascular-Health%2FHeart-Disease%2FHypertension>

- The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics is your trusted source of food and nutrition information. The academy offers information on nutrition and health, from meal planning and prep to choices that can help prevent or manage health conditions and more. See a selection of resources on hypertension prevention and control on their website.

### **Three Steps to a Healthy Heart Community:** <https://pophealthinnovationlab.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/618-HeartdDisease-DesignPackage-Final-011722.pdf>

- This toolkit from the Public Health Institute and Population Health Innovation Lab provides guidance on developing an effective community action collaborative to address hypertension and cardiovascular risk.

## APPENDIX: Vendors who offer hypertension programs for employers

There are many healthcare service “vendors” who provide support for care coordination, care management, health coaching, lifestyle change, and other related strategies, both for the general population and specific to the population with hypertension. The following list is by no means exhaustive but may serve as a starting point for employers seeking a hypertension-specific point solution. This is informational only, and not intended as an endorsement.

**Teledoc Health:** <https://www.teladoc.com/health-talk/blood-pressure-advice-why-you-should-care-and-what-you-need-to-know/>

- Teladoc Health, Inc. is a multinational telemedicine and virtual healthcare company headquartered in the United States. Teladoc offers a virtual hypertension management solution to employer organizations to help their employee populations better manage blood pressure-related health risks. The hypertension solution through Livongo offers employees a blood pressure monitor, that tracks progress, delivers personalized interventions by clinical experts, care coordination and data integration, member communications and support.

**Livongo:** <https://www.livongo.com/>

- Livongo is a part of Teladoc Health and provides virtual diabetes management and prevention, hypertension, and weight loss management solutions to employer organizations to help their employee populations better manage health risks. The hypertension solution offers employees a blood pressure monitor, that tracks progress, delivers personalized interventions by clinical experts, care coordination and data integration, member communications and support.

**Hello Heart:** <https://www.helloheart.com/>

- Hello Heart is an app that helps people track, understand, and manage blood pressure and cholesterol, and it comes with a blood pressure monitor. The Hello Heart hypertension program empowers people to understand and improve their heart health using technology and behavioral science and can be offered through participating employers to help employees manage heart health while potentially reducing medical claims costs.

**Omada Health:** <https://www.omadahealth.com/hypertension>

- The Omada for Hypertension program is a virtual integrated solution to care that helps members manage their hypertension for improved long-term results. Omada’s care plan for the hypertension program includes health coaches and hypertension specialists, hypertension-specific peer groups and communities, disease education, remote blood pressure monitoring, data tracking, benefits referrals and medication adherence.

## APPENDIX: Key Terms and Abbreviations

Term	Abbreviation
BP	Blood Pressure
CDC	U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention ( <a href="https://www.cdc.gov">https://www.cdc.gov</a> )
HEDIS	Healthcare Effectiveness Data & Information Set ( <a href="https://www.ncqa.org/hedis/">https://www.ncqa.org/hedis/</a> )
HTN	Hypertension
MTM	Medication Therapy Management
NCQA	National Committee for Quality Assurance ( <a href="https://www.ncqa.org">https://www.ncqa.org</a> )
PBM	Pharmacy Benefits Manager
PEPM	Per Employee Per Month
TPA	Third Party Administrator
V-BID	Value-based insurance design

**The Greater Philadelphia Business Coalition on Health (GPBCH)** seeks to increase the value of health benefit spending for its employer members, by improving workforce and community health, increasing healthcare quality and safety, and reducing health care costs. The Coalition represents employer interests in working with health plans, health care providers, benefits consultants, suppliers and other system stakeholders to address population health priorities and to ensure that when health care is needed it is accessible, affordable, high-quality, and safe.