

**Employers' belief in the effectiveness of wellness and disease management rises notably**

INDIANAPOLIS, IN, September 19/PRNewswire/ -- United Benefit Advisors (UBA), (<http://benefits.com>), an alliance of 141 of the nation's premier independent benefit advisory firms, today released the results of its second annual Employer Opinion Survey on Healthcare.

In addition to polling employers as to the extent and effectiveness of their current and planned cost containment strategies, the survey elicited employer opinions regarding responsibility for health care costs, the desired role of the government in controlling costs, and employers' predictions regarding real change (if any) to health care delivery over the next five years.

The most prevalent cost-containment strategies used by employers continue to be reducing plan benefits and/or increasing employee premium cost-sharing. However, employers now believe wellness programs that incorporate individual health risk assessments and expanded disease management programs to help employees manage chronic health conditions are equally effective at cost-containment.

"Employers' perception regarding the cost-containment potential of comprehensive wellness and chronic disease management has reached a tipping point", said David LoCascio, UBA's Co-Founder. "The focus for many employers has clearly shifted to preventing and managing employee health rather than solely cutting benefits and/or increasing employee contributions."

Among the additional survey findings, three clear responses emerged. First, only 28% of employers (versus 30% last year) believe the primary responsibility for controlling healthcare costs reside with the parties directly involved: the employees, the physicians, and the hospitals. Almost all responsibility has been ceded to intermediaries: insurers/health plans, government, and employers.

Second, as first reported following last year's UBA survey, an overwhelming majority of employers believe the federal government has a definite role to play regarding health care: that of requiring all hospitals, physicians, and insurers/health plans to publicly disclose all cost and quality information.

"Employers are clearly fed up with being denied access to the cost and quality information that both employers and employees need and deserve in order to make informed health care purchasing decisions in advance of receiving care", said Mr. LoCascio. "Everyone has been relegated to simply paying for health care rather than being allowed to purchase health care the same way they purchase a home, a car, or any other goods or services."

In 2006, a few insurers (including industry giants CIGNA and Aetna) have finally begun releasing provider-specific cost information in limited markets. This long-overdue disclosure has the potential to simultaneously lower employer and employee costs through informed purchasing, reward higher quality providers, increase competition among insurers and health plans, and allow consumer driven health care to fulfill its promise.

Third, nearly all employers (91.1%) predict cost will shift more to employees within the next five years, and a majority (52.9%) believe Consumer Driven Health Plans will dominate in the future versus only 11.5% who disagree.

"The survey results clearly show that nearly all employers, regardless of size or industry, are determined to change the way employers and employees purchase health care", said Mr. LoCascio. "The days of intermediaries (the insurers, government, and employers themselves) being primarily responsible for health care costs are ending. Employees want and deserve far more control over how their money is allocated and which providers they use for care."

Copies of the survey which yielded responses from 1,094 employers comprising a nationwide sample based on industry, region, and number of employees, are available for purchase via UBA's website at [www.benefits.com](http://www.benefits.com).

A companion report, the 2006 UBA Health Plan Survey was released on September 13. With responses from 13,663 health plans sponsored by more than 9,600 employers nationwide, it is by far the largest and most comprehensive survey of plan design and plan costs ever conducted. The report provides vital benchmark statistics on hundreds of health plan factors, including detailed enrollment, plan design, plan cost, employee premium cost-sharing, prescription drug, retiree plan, and flexible spending account norms.

#### **About United Benefit Advisors (UBA)**

UBA, (<http://benefits.com>), is one of the nation's largest employee benefits advisory organizations with over 1,900 experienced benefits professionals located in more than 160 offices across North America. As an alliance of the nation's premier independent benefit advisory firms, UBA members are better positioned to help employers and employees respond more efficiently and effectively to the challenges of an ever-changing employee benefits marketplace.

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