



Date

RE: Domestic partner coverage

Dear Group Administrator,

As you probably know, Washington State passed legislation (SB 5688) this year requiring health plans to extend to registered same-sex domestic partners and opposite-sex couples (as long as one is at least 62 years old) the same coverage they extend to legal spouses. The law's original effective date was July 26, 2009. But after a challenge and a popular vote (which upheld the original law), the effective date is now Dec. 3, 2009.

We're doing everything necessary to comply with this new law. In fact, in addition to extending coverage to domestic partners who are registered in any state (regardless of age), we're also extending coverage to non-registered domestic partners. Both registered and non-registered domestic partners will be able to enroll just as spouses do.

Which employers are affected?

This new policy impacts groups of all sizes with Asuris medical, vision and/or dental coverage (except for self-funded groups, which can opt out of the law). Regence Life and Health Insurance Company is extending life insurance coverage to all categories of domestic partners as well.

How do domestic partners enroll?

Although we won't require state-registered domestic partners to submit proof of registration when they submit an enrollment form, we may ask for proof in the future in the course of a standard eligibility audit.

Non-registered domestic partners will need to submit a completed enrollment form, along with an Affidavit of Qualifying Domestic Partnership. This form, along with all of our updated enrollment applications, is available at **www.asuris/employer**.

A special 30-day open enrollment period for all groups will run for 30 days from the date of this letter. During this period, eligible domestic partners may enroll on group coverage for an effective date of Jan. 1, 2010 (unless a group has a date-of-marriage eligibility provision that would dictate a different effective date). **Please let your employees know about this special open enrollment period as soon as possible.**

What about federal laws?

Although federal law doesn't recognize domestic partners, we'll treat enrolled domestic partners as spouses when it comes to federal laws, such as COBRA, the Federal Medical Leave Act and HIPAA special enrollment provisions.

When will contracts change?

If your group has EmbarkSM, VantageSM, MotivateSM or Asuris HSA Healthplan 2.0SM medical coverage and/or AspireSM or EnhanceSM dental coverage, new language about domestic partner eligibility will be included with your 2010 contract renewal. All other groups will receive a contract amendment at their 2010 renewal.

We welcome these new members to the Asuris community and are looking forward to working with them for years to come.

If you have any questions about our new policies, please talk to your agent or your Asuris sales team. Since this new law can impact employers in several ways, talk to your legal counsel or tax advisor to learn about other implications it may have for you.

Sincerely,

Asuris Northwest Health