

Benefit selections for letter carriers converted to career employees

Are you a city carrier assistant who is getting close to converting to career? If so, there are some important career benefit decisions you need to prepare for and deadlines you definitely don't want to miss. Conversion to career is an exciting time for city letter carriers, as they become eligible for additional benefit options, but it's important to know the enrollment time frames so that you can make the most out of your benefits for you and your family.

Most career benefit selections must be completed within 60 days of conversion. Newly converted letter carriers need to be mindful of these time limits and complete the enrollment process before the applicable deadline. Some of the benefit programs may offer opportunities to enroll or to amend your coverage during open season or with a qualifying life event (QLE); however, these opportunities may be restricted and might vary based on the program. Letter carriers should not wait until open season or a QLE to enroll.

New career letter carriers will receive a benefits booklet in the mail from USPS Human Resource Shared Service Center (HRSSC). This booklet will contain documents needed for processing changes to benefits available to career letter carriers. In addition to the booklet, letter carriers can enter changes online using the MyHR Apps and PostalEASE at liteblue.usps.gov. If you do not receive your booklet soon after conversion, contact your local branch officer or regional office so they can investigate.

Here are the benefits new carriers will have to make decisions on:

Postal Service Health Benefits (PSHB) Program—The PSHB is a

new, separate program within the Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Program, administered by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). PSHB will provide health benefits plans to eligible Postal Service employees, Postal Service annuitants, and their eligible family members starting on Jan. 1, 2025. Once you are converted to a career position, you have 60 days to enroll in a PSHB health plan.

The PSHB program has many plans to choose from, including the NALC Health Benefit Plan (HBP). The NALC HBP is a comprehensive plan that has provided letter carriers and their families with first-rate health insurance since 1950. The plan is owned and operated by letter carriers and pays particular attention to their health needs. The plan is not-for-profit; its only focus is the health of its members.

The premiums for the plan you choose will be split between you and the Postal Service. Article 21 of the National Agreement sets the percentage of the premiums that will be paid by each. USPS pays 72 percent of the weighted biweekly premiums as determined by OPM.

If you were enrolled in the USPS Non-Career Employee Health Benefits Plan and converted to a career position, your enrollment is terminated the last day of the month that is 28 days after you were converted. If you choose to enroll in an PSHB plan, your USPS Non-Career Employee Health Benefits Plan coverage will end when your PSHB coverage begins.

It is recommended that you enroll in the PSHB program as soon as possible to avoid any gap in coverage or to start receiving health benefits. Enrollment is not retroactive. Your

coverage in the PSHB plan will begin the first day of the first pay period after Human Resources receives your election.

To sign up for a PSHB plan, you can use the PostalEASE website at liteblue.usps.gov, or an employee self-service kiosk (available in some postal facilities). Have all your enrollment information available; this is the fastest way to receive coverage.

Federal Employees Group Life Insurance (FEGLI)—All career letter carriers are entitled to life insurance coverage under the FEGLI program. The amount of coverage for a full-time letter carrier is based on their annual salary. Part-time flexibles receive coverage based on their hourly rate and step.

Enrollment in FEGLI basic coverage is automatic upon conversion unless you waive coverage, but if you would like to purchase additional optional coverage, you must apply within 60 days of conversion by completing and submitting SF 2817, Life Insurance Election Form. Carriers should be aware that eligibility to enroll in optional insurance after your first 60 days is limited, and open season for FEGLI is rare. The most recent FEGLI open seasons were in 2004 and 2016. If you want additional optional FEGLI coverage, do not miss the 60-day deadline. FEGLI basic coverage begins the first day you are in a pay and duty status after you are converted to career. USPS pays the entire cost of the basic coverage. The amount of basic coverage is your annual rate of base pay rounded up to the next even \$1,000, plus \$2,000.

Accidental Death and Dismemberment (AD&D)—AD&D insurance

is automatically included in basic life insurance at no additional cost. It is equal to your basic insurance amount described above. Above the basic insurance, FEGLI has additional optional coverage that you can purchase for you or your spouse and dependents. To select any of the optional coverage, you must enroll within 60 days from the day you were converted to career status. The cost is determined by the amount and type of coverage you choose, as well as your age. Optional insurance for new employees is effective on the first day you are in a pay and duty status in an eligible position or the day after the HRSSC receives your election.

NALC also offers its members a variety of life insurance options at affordable rates through the U.S. Letter Carriers Mutual Benefit Association (MBA). MBA was created with the sole purpose of serving letter carriers. MBA offers a variety of life insurance products, including whole and term life. In addition, annuities (non-qualified), traditional IRA and Roth IRA are offered. For more information about MBA and its plans, contact your local MBA representative, call the association at NALC Headquarters at 202-638-4318 or visit nalc.org/mba.

Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS) and Thrift Savings Plan (TSP)—Newly converted career letter carriers are automatically enrolled in FERS and TSP. Participation in the TSP is voluntary. However, after conversion, 5 percent of your base pay will be automatically deducted from your paycheck each pay period and deposited in your TSP account, unless you have made an election to change or stop your contri-

butions. To increase, decrease or cancel your contributions, log onto liteblue.usps.gov. To change the allocation of your TSP investments, log onto tsp.gov once you receive your TSP account number and password. Some contributions to the TSP are tax-deferred, which provides you with a tax benefit at the time of your contribution.

When converted to career status, CCAs who participate in the NALC CCA Retirement Savings Plan may transfer their traditional retirement funds to the TSP with no surrender charge. The surrender charge will be waived in this instance only.

For more information on FERS, visit opm.gov/retirement-center/fers-information. For more information on the TSP, visit its website at tsp.gov.

Federal Employees Dental and Vision Insurance Program (FEDVIP)—FEDVIP is a voluntary program designed to provide supplemental dental and vision benefits, which are available on an enrollee-pay-all basis (no USPS contribution toward premiums) to federal civilian and U.S. Postal Service employees, retirees, and their family members. Letter carriers are eligible to enroll in FEDVIP upon conversion to career status. You do not need to be enrolled in the PSHB program to be eligible for FEDVIP; however, to enroll in FEDVIP, you must meet the same eligibility requirements as PSHB. If you are newly eligible for FEDVIP, you have 60 days from the date you became eligible to enroll in a FEDVIP dental and/or vision plan. You can enroll in FEDVIP using the BENEFEDES online portal at benefeds.gov.

Flexible spending accounts (FSA)—An FSA is a tax-favored pro-

gram offered by employers that allows their employees to pay for eligible out-of-pocket health care and dependent care expenses with pre-tax dollars. By using pre-tax dollars to pay for eligible health care and dependent care expenses, an FSA gives you an immediate discount on these expenses that equals the taxes you would otherwise pay on that money. Career letter carriers are eligible for all FSA options and may enroll up to 60 days from their conversion date but before Oct. 1 of the calendar year or wait for open season.

For the 2025 benefit year, Inspira Financial is the administrator of the Postal Service's FSA program. Inspira's health care flexible spending account (HCFSA) lets you put pretax money aside for eligible health care expenses such as contact lenses, allergy and pain relief medications, hearing aids and prescription eyeglasses. Inspira also offers a limited-purpose flexible spending account, which is like a health care FSA but is specifically for dental and vision expenses. The Inspira dependent care flexible spending account also lets carriers use pretax money for eligible expenses to care for dependents through day care or in-home care.

For more information or to enroll, go to liteblue.usps.gov, select "Sign In," enter your employee ID and enter your password. Verify your identity with a security method. Enter your security code. Select the flexible spending account icon from the LiteBlue employee applications page.

Use the information here to make the most out of your benefits. Congratulations on your new career position. **PR**