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end for the alternate recipient(s) when similarly situated dependents are no longer eligible for coverage under the terms of the plan, or upon the occurrence of certain specified events.

(d)(1) Under ERISA section 609(a)(4), a qualified medical child support order may not require a plan to provide any type or form of benefit, or any option, not otherwise provided under the plan, except to the extent necessary to meet the requirements of a law relating to medical child support described in section 1908 of the Social Security Act, 42 U.S.C. 1396g–1.

(2) The Notice satisfies the conditions of ERISA section 609(a)(4) because it requires the plan to provide to an alternate recipient only those benefits that the plan provides to any dependent of a participant who is enrolled in the plan, and any other benefits that are necessary to meet the requirements of a State law described in such section 1908.

(e) For the purposes of this section, an “Issuing Agency” is a State agency that administers the child support enforcement program under Part D of Title IV of the Social Security Act.

[65 FR 82142, Dec. 27, 2000]

Subpart B—Health Coverage Portability, Nondiscrimination, and Renewability


§ 2590.701–1 Basis and scope.

(a) Statutory basis. This Subpart B implements Part 7 of Subtitle B of Title I of the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974, as amended (hereinafter ERISA or the Act).

(b) Scope. A group health plan or health insurance issuer offering group health insurance coverage may provide greater rights to participants and beneficiaries than those set forth in this Subpart B. This Subpart B sets forth minimum requirements for group health plans and group health insurance issuers offering group health insurance coverage concerning certain consumer protections of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), including special enrollment periods and the prohibition against discrimination based on a health factor, as amended by the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (Affordable Care Act). Other consumer protection provisions, including other protections provided by the Affordable Care Act and the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act, are set forth in Subpart C of this part.


§ 2590.701–2 Definitions.

Unless otherwise provided, the definitions in this section govern in applying the provisions of §§ 2590.701 through 2590.734.

Affiliation period means a period of time that must expire before health insurance coverage provided by an HMO becomes effective, and during which the HMO is not required to provide benefits.

COBRA definitions:

(1) COBRA means Title X of the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1985, as amended.

(2) COBRA continuation coverage means coverage, under a group health plan, that satisfies an applicable COBRA continuation provision.

(3) COBRA continuation provision means sections 601–608 of the Act, section 4980B of the Internal Revenue Code (other than paragraph (f)(1) of such section 4980B insofar as it relates to pediatric vaccines), or Title XXII of the PHS Act.

(4) Exhaustion of COBRA continuation coverage means that an individual’s COBRA continuation coverage ceases—

(i) Due to the failure of the employer or other responsible entity to remit premiums on a timely basis;

(ii) When the individual no longer resides, lives, or works in the service...
area of an HMO or similar program (whether or not within the choice of the individual) and there is no other COBRA continuation coverage available to the individual; or

(iii) When the individual incurs a claim that would meet or exceed a lifetime limit on all benefits and there is no other COBRA continuation coverage available to the individual.

**Condition** means a medical condition.

**Creditable coverage** means creditable coverage within the meaning of §2590.701–4(a).

**Dependent** means any individual who is or may become eligible for coverage under the terms of a group health plan because of a relationship to a participant.

**Enroll** means to become covered for benefits under a group health plan (that is, when coverage becomes effective), without regard to when the individual may have completed or filed any forms that are required in order to become covered under the plan. For this purpose, an individual who has health coverage under a group health plan is enrolled in the plan regardless of whether the individual elects coverage, the individual is a dependent who becomes covered as a result of an election by a participant, or the individual becomes covered without an election.

**Enrollment date** means the first day of coverage or, if there is a waiting period, the first day of the waiting period. If an individual receiving benefits under a group health plan changes benefit packages, or if the plan changes group health insurance issuers, the individual’s enrollment date does not change.

**Excepted benefits** means the benefits described as excepted in §2590.732(c).

**First day of coverage** means, in the case of an individual covered for benefits under a group health plan, the first day of coverage under the plan and, in the case of an individual covered by health insurance coverage in the individual market, the first day of coverage under the policy or contract.

**Genetic information** has the meaning given the term in §2590.702–1(a)(3) of this Part.

**Group health insurance coverage** means health insurance coverage offered in connection with a group health plan.

**Group health plan** or plan means a group health plan within the meaning of §2590.732(a).

**Group market** means the market for health insurance coverage offered in connection with a group health plan. (However, certain very small plans may be treated as being in the individual market, rather than the group market; see the definition of individual market in this section.)

**Health insurance coverage** means benefits consisting of medical care (provided directly, through insurance or reimbursement, or otherwise) under any hospital or medical service policy or certificate, hospital or medical service plan contract, or HMO contract offered by a health insurance issuer. Health insurance coverage includes group health insurance coverage, individual health insurance coverage, and short-term, limited-duration insurance.

**Health insurance issuer** or issuer means an insurance company, insurance service, or insurance organization (including an HMO) that is required to be licensed to engage in the business of insurance in a State and that is subject to State law that regulates insurance (within the meaning of section 514(b)(2) of the Act). Such term does not include a group health plan.

**Health maintenance organization** or HMO means—

(1) A federally qualified health maintenance organization (as defined in section 1301(a) of the PHS Act);

(2) An organization recognized under State law as a health maintenance organization; or

(3) A similar organization regulated under State law for solvency in the same manner and to the same extent as such a health maintenance organization.

**Individual health insurance coverage** means health insurance coverage offered to individuals in the individual market, but does not include short-term, limited-duration insurance. Individual health insurance coverage can include dependent coverage.

**Individual market** means the market for health insurance coverage offered to individuals other than in connection with a group health plan. Unless a
State elects otherwise in accordance with section 2791(e)(1)(B)(ii) of the PHS Act, such term also includes coverage offered in connection with a group health plan that has fewer than two participants who are current employees on the first day of the plan year.

Internal Revenue Code means the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended (Title 26, United States Code).

Issuer means a health insurance issuer.

Late enrollee means an individual whose enrollment in a plan is a late enrollment.

Late enrollment means enrollment of an individual under a group health plan other than on the earliest date on which coverage can become effective for the individual under the terms of the plan; or through special enrollment. (For rules relating to special enrollment, see §2590.701–6.) If an individual ceases to be eligible for coverage under a plan, and then subsequently becomes eligible for coverage under the plan, only the individual's most recent period of eligibility is taken into account in determining whether the individual is a late enrollee under the plan with respect to the most recent period of coverage. Similar rules apply if an individual again becomes eligible for coverage following a suspension of coverage that applied generally under the plan.

Medical care means amounts paid for—

(1) The diagnosis, cure, mitigation, treatment, or prevention of disease, or amounts paid for the purpose of affecting any structure or function of the body;

(2) Transportation primarily for and essential to medical care referred to in paragraph (1) of this definition; and

(3) Insurance covering medical care referred to in paragraphs (1) and (2) of this definition.

Medical condition or condition means any condition, whether physical or mental, including, but not limited to, any condition resulting from illness, injury (whether or not the injury is accidental), pregnancy, or congenital malformation. However, genetic information is not a condition.

Participant means participant within the meaning of section 3(7) of the Act.

Placement, or being placed, for adoption means the assumption and retention of a legal obligation for total or partial support of a child by a person with whom the child has been placed in anticipation of the child's adoption. The child's placement for adoption with such person ends upon the termination of such legal obligation.

Plan year means the year that is designated as the plan year in the plan document of a group health plan, except that if the plan document does not designate a plan year or if there is no plan document, the plan year is:

(1) The deductible or limit year used under the plan;

(2) If the plan does not impose deductibles or limits on a yearly basis, then the plan year is the policy year;

(3) If the plan does not impose deductibles or limits on a yearly basis, and either the plan is not insured or the insurance policy is not renewed on an annual basis, then the plan year is the employer's taxable year; or

(4) In any other case, the plan year is the calendar year.

Preexisting condition exclusion means a limitation or exclusion of benefits (including a denial of coverage) based on the fact that the condition was present before the effective date of coverage (or if coverage is denied, the date of the denial) under a group health plan or group or individual health insurance coverage (or other coverage provided to federally eligible individuals pursuant to 45 CFR part 148), whether or not any medical advice, diagnosis, care, or treatment was recommended or received before that day. A preexisting condition exclusion includes any limitation or exclusion of benefits (including a denial of coverage) applicable to an individual as a result of information relating to an individual's health status before the individual's effective date of coverage (or if coverage is denied, the date of the denial) under a group health plan, group or individual health insurance coverage (or other coverage provided to Federally eligible individuals pursuant to 45 CFR part 148), such as a condition identified as a result of a pre-enrollment questionnaire or physical examination given to the individual, or review of
Preexisting condition exclusions.

(a) Preexisting condition exclusion defined—(1) A preexisting condition exclusion means a preexisting condition exclusion within the meaning set forth in §2590.701–2 of this part.

(2) Examples. The rules of this paragraph (a)(1) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) Facts. A group health plan provides benefits solely through an insurance policy offered by Issuer S. At the expiration of the policy, the plan switches coverage to a policy offered by Issuer T. Issuer T’s policy excludes benefits for any prosthesis if the body part was lost before the effective date of coverage under the policy.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 1, the exclusion of benefits for any prosthesis because it operates to exclude benefits for a condition based on the fact that the condition was present before the effective date of coverage under the policy. The exclusion of benefits, therefore, is prohibited.

Example 2. (i) Facts. A group health plan provides coverage for cosmetic surgery in cases of accidental injury, but only if the injury occurred while the individual was covered under the plan.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 2, the plan provision excluding cosmetic surgery benefits for individuals injured before enrolling in the plan is a preexisting condition exclusion because it operates to exclude benefits relating to a condition based on the fact that the condition was present before the effective date of coverage. The plan provision, therefore, is prohibited.

Example 3. (i) Facts. A group health plan provides coverage for the treatment of diabetes, generally not subject to any requirement to obtain an approval for a treatment plan. However, if an individual was diagnosed with diabetes before the effective date of coverage under the plan, diabetes coverage is subject to a requirement to obtain approval of a treatment plan in advance.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 3, the requirement to obtain advance approval of a treatment plan is a preexisting condition exclusion because it limits benefits for a condition based on the fact that the condition was present before the effective date of coverage. The plan provision, therefore, is prohibited.

Example 4. (i) Facts. A group health plan provides coverage for infertility treatments. The plan counts against the three-treatment limit benefits provided under prior health coverage.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 4, counting benefits for a specific condition provided under prior health coverage against a treatment limit for that condition is a preexisting condition exclusion because it operates to limit benefits for a condition based on the fact that the condition was present before the effective date of coverage. The plan provision, therefore, is prohibited.

Example 5. (i) Facts. When an individual’s coverage begins under a group health plan, the individual generally becomes eligible for all benefits. However, benefits for pregnancy are not available until the individual has been covered under the plan for 12 months.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 5, the requirement to be covered under the plan for 12 months to be eligible for pregnancy benefits is a subterfuge for a preexisting condition exclusion because it is designed to exclude benefits for a condition (pregnancy) that arose before the effective date of coverage. The plan provision, therefore, is prohibited.

Example 6. (i) Facts. A group health plan provides coverage for medically necessary items and services, generally including medical records relating to the pre-enrollment period.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 6, coverage is a preexisting condition exclusion because it operates to exclude benefits for a condition based on the fact that the condition was present before the effective date of coverage under the policy. The exclusion of benefits, therefore, is prohibited.
§ 2590.701-4 Rules relating to creditable coverage.

(a) General rules—(1) Creditable coverage. For purposes of this section, except as provided in paragraph (a)(2) of this section, the term creditable coverage means coverage of an individual under any of the following:

(i) A group health plan as defined in §2590.732(a).

(ii) Health insurance coverage as defined in §2590.701-2 (whether or not the entity offering the coverage is subject to Part 7 of Subtitle B of Title I of the Act, and without regard to whether the coverage is offered in the group market, the individual market, or otherwise).

(iii) Part A or B of Title XVIII of the Social Security Act (Medicare).

(iv) Title XIX of the Social Security Act (Medicaid), other than coverage consisting solely of benefits under section 1928 of the Social Security Act (the program for distribution of pediatric vaccines).

(v) Title 10 U.S.C. Chapter 55 (medical and dental care for members and certain former members of the uniformed services, and for their dependents; for purposes of Title 10 U.S.C. Chapter 55, uniformed services means the armed forces and the Commissioned Corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and of the Public Health Service).

(vi) A medical care program of the Indian Health Service or of a tribal organization.

(vii) A State health benefits risk pool. For purposes of this section, a State health benefits risk pool means—

(A) An organization qualifying under section 501(c)(26) of the Internal Revenue Code;

(B) A qualified high risk pool described in section 2744(c)(2) of the PHS Act; or

(C) Any other arrangement sponsored by a State, the membership composition of which is specified by the State and which is established and maintained primarily to provide health coverage for individuals who are residents of such State and who, by reason of the existence or history of a medical condition—

(I) Are unable to acquire medical care coverage for such condition through insurance or from an HMO, or

(2) Are able to acquire such coverage only at a rate which is substantially in excess of the rate for such coverage through the membership organization.

(viii) A health plan offered under Title 5 U.S.C. Chapter 89 (the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program).

(ix) A public health plan. For purposes of this section, a public health plan means any plan established or
maintained by a State, the U.S. government, a foreign country, or any political subdivision of a State, the U.S. government, or a foreign country that provides health coverage to individuals who are enrolled in the plan.

(x) A health benefit plan under section 5(e) of the Peace Corps Act (22 U.S.C. 2504(e)).

(xi) Title XXI of the Social Security Act (State Children’s Health Insurance Program).

(2) Excluded coverage. Creditable coverage does not include coverage of solely excepted benefits (described in §2590.732).

(b) Counting creditable coverage rules superseded by prohibition on preexisting condition exclusion. See §2590.715–2704 for rules prohibiting the imposition of a preexisting condition exclusion.


§2590.701–5 Evidence of creditable coverage.

(a) In general. The rules for providing certificates of creditable coverage and demonstrating creditable coverage have been superseded by the prohibition on preexisting condition exclusions. See §2590.715–2704 for rules prohibiting the imposition of a preexisting condition exclusion.

(b) Applicability. The provisions of this section apply beginning December 31, 2014.

[79 FR 10309, Feb. 24, 2014]

§2590.701–6 Special enrollment periods.

(a) Special enrollment for certain individuals who lose coverage—(1) In general. A group health plan, and a health insurance issuer offering health insurance coverage in connection with a group health plan, is required to permit current employees and dependents (as defined in §2590.701–2) who are described in paragraph (a)(2) of this section to enroll for coverage under the terms of the plan if the conditions in paragraph (a)(3) of this section are satisfied. The special enrollment rights under this paragraph (a) apply without regard to the dates on which an individual would otherwise be able to enroll under the plan.

(2) Individuals eligible for special enrollment—(i) When employee loses coverage. A current employee and any dependents (including the employee’s spouse) each are eligible for special enrollment in any benefit package under the plan (subject to plan eligibility rules conditioning dependent enrollment on enrollment of the employee) if—

(A) The employee and the dependents are otherwise eligible to enroll in the benefit package;

(B) When coverage under the plan was previously offered, the employee had coverage under any group health plan or health insurance coverage; and

(C) The employee satisfies the conditions of paragraph (a)(3)(i), (ii), or (iii) of this section and, if applicable, paragraph (a)(3)(iv) of this section.

(ii) When dependent loses coverage—(A) A dependent of a current employee (including the employee’s spouse) and the employee each are eligible for special enrollment in any benefit package under the plan (subject to plan eligibility rules conditioning dependent enrollment on enrollment of the employee) if—

(1) The dependent and the employee are otherwise eligible to enroll in the benefit package;

(2) When coverage under the plan was previously offered, the dependent had coverage under any group health plan or health insurance coverage; and

(3) The dependent satisfies the conditions of paragraph (a)(3)(i), (ii), or (iii) of this section and, if applicable, paragraph (a)(3)(iv) of this section.

(B) However, the plan or issuer is not required to enroll any other dependent unless that dependent satisfies the criteria of this paragraph (a)(2)(ii), or the employee satisfies the criteria of paragraph (a)(2)(i) of this section.

(iii) Examples. The rules of this paragraph (a)(2) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) Facts. Individual A works for Employer X. A’s spouse, and A’s dependent children are eligible but not enrolled for coverage under X’s group health plan. A’s spouse works for Employer Y and at the time coverage was offered under X’s plan, A was enrolled in coverage under Y’s plan.
(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 1, because A satisfies the conditions for special enrollment under paragraph (a)(2)(i) of this section, A, A’s spouse, and A’s dependent children are eligible for special enrollment under X’s plan.

Example 2. (i) Facts. Individual A and A’s spouse are eligible but not enrolled for coverage under Group Health Plan Y maintained by A’s employer. When A was first presented with an opportunity to enroll A and A’s spouse, they did not have other coverage. Later, A and A’s spouse enroll in Group Health Plan Q maintained by the employer of A’s spouse. During a subsequent open enrollment period in P, A and A’s spouse did not enroll because of their coverage under Q. They then lose eligibility for coverage under Q.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 2, because A and A’s spouse were covered under Q when they did not enroll in P during open enrollment, they satisfy the conditions for special enrollment under paragraphs (a)(2)(i) and (ii) of this section. Consequently, A and A’s spouse are eligible for special enrollment under P.

Example 3. (i) Facts. Individual B works for Employer X. B and B’s spouse are eligible but not enrolled for coverage under X’s group health plan. B’s spouse works for Employer Y and at the time coverage was offered under X’s plan, B’s spouse was enrolled in self-only coverage under Y’s group health plan. Then, B’s spouse loses eligibility for coverage under Y’s plan.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 3, because B’s spouse satisfies the conditions for special enrollment under paragraph (a)(2)(ii) of this section, both B and B’s spouse are eligible for special enrollment under X’s plan.

Example 4. (i) Facts. Individual A works for Employer X. X maintains a group health plan with two benefit packages—an HMO option and an indemnity option. Self-only and family coverage are available under both options. A enrolls for self-only coverage in the HMO option. A’s spouse works for Employer Y and was enrolled for self-only coverage under Y’s plan at the time coverage was offered under X’s plan. Then, A’s spouse loses coverage under Y’s plan. A requests special enrollment for A and A’s spouse under the plan’s indemnity option.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 4, because A’s spouse satisfies the conditions for special enrollment under paragraph (a)(2)(ii) of this section, both A and A’s spouse can enroll in either benefit package under X’s plan. Therefore, if A requests enrollment in accordance with the requirements of this section, the plan must allow A and A’s spouse to enroll in the indemnity option.

(3) Conditions for special enrollment—

(i) Loss of eligibility for coverage. In the case of an employee or dependent who has coverage that is not COBRA continuation coverage, the conditions of this paragraph (a)(3)(i) are satisfied at the time the coverage is terminated as a result of loss of eligibility (regardless of whether the individual is eligible for or elects COBRA continuation coverage). Loss of eligibility under this paragraph (a)(3)(i) does not include a loss due to the failure of the employee or dependent to pay premiums on a timely basis or termination of coverage for cause (such as making a fraudulent claim or an intentional misrepresentation of a material fact in connection with the plan). Loss of eligibility for coverage under this paragraph (a)(3)(i) includes (but is not limited to)—

(A) Loss of eligibility for coverage as a result of legal separation, divorce, cessation of dependent status (such as attaining the maximum age to be eligible as a dependent child under the plan), death of an employee, termination of employment, reduction in the number of hours of employment, and any loss of eligibility for coverage after a period that is measured by reference to any of the foregoing;

(B) In the case of coverage offered through an HMO, or other arrangement, in the individual market that does not provide benefits to individuals who no longer reside, live, or work in a service area, loss of coverage because an individual no longer resides, lives, or works in the service area (whether or not within the choice of the individual);

(C) In the case of coverage offered through an HMO, or other arrangement, in the group market that does not provide benefits to individuals who no longer reside, live, or work in a service area, loss of coverage because an individual no longer resides, lives, or works in the service area (whether or not within the choice of the individual), and no other benefit package is available to the individual; and

(D) A situation in which a plan no longer offers any benefits to the class of similarly situated individuals (as described in §2590.702(d)) that includes the individual.

(ii) Termination of employer contributions. In the case of an employee or dependent who has coverage that is not
COBRA continuation coverage, the conditions of this paragraph (a)(3)(ii) are satisfied at the time employer contributions towards the employee’s or dependent’s coverage terminate. Employer contributions include contributions by any current or former employer that was contributing to coverage for the employee or dependent.

(iii) Exhaustion of COBRA continuation coverage. In the case of an employee or dependent who has coverage that is COBRA continuation coverage, the conditions of this paragraph (a)(3)(iii) are satisfied at the time the COBRA continuation coverage is exhausted. For purposes of this paragraph (a)(3)(iii), an individual who satisfies the conditions for special enrollment of paragraph (a)(3)(i) of this section, does not enroll, and instead elects and exhausts COBRA continuation coverage satisfies the conditions of this paragraph (a)(3)(iii). (Exhaustion of COBRA continuation coverage is defined in §2590.701–2.)

(iv) Written statement. A plan may require an employee declining coverage (for the employee or any dependent of the employee) to state in writing whether the coverage is being declined due to other health coverage only if, at or before the time the employee declines coverage, the employee is provided with notice of the requirement to provide the statement (and the consequences of the employee’s failure to provide the statement). If a plan requires such a statement, and an employee does not provide it, the plan is not required to provide special enrollment to the employee or any dependent of the employee under this paragraph (a)(3). A plan must treat an employee as having satisfied the plan requirement permitted under this paragraph (a)(3)(iv) if the employee provides a written statement that coverage was being declined because the employee or dependent had other coverage; a plan cannot require anything more for the employee to satisfy the plan’s requirement to provide a written statement. (For example, the plan cannot require that the statement be notarized.)

(v) The rules of this paragraph (a)(3) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) Facts. Individual D enrolls in a group health plan maintained by Employer Y. At the time D enrolls, Y pays 70 percent of the cost of employee coverage and D pays the rest. Y announces that beginning January 1, Y will no longer make employer contributions towards the coverage. Employees may maintain coverage, however, if they pay the total cost of the coverage.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 1, employer contributions towards D’s coverage ceased on January 1 and the conditions of paragraph (a)(3)(ii) of this section are satisfied on this date (regardless of whether D elects to pay the total cost and continue coverage under Y’s plan).

Example 2. (i) Facts. A group health plan provides coverage through two options—Option 1 and Option 2. Employees can enroll in either option only within 30 days of hire or on January 1 of each year. Employee A is eligible for both options and enrolls in Option 1. Effective July 1 the plan terminates coverage under Option 1 and the plan does not create an immediate open enrollment opportunity into Option 2.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 2, A has experienced a loss of eligibility for coverage that satisfies paragraph (a)(3)(i) of this section, and has satisfied the other conditions for special enrollment under paragraph (a)(3)(ii) of this section. Therefore, if A satisfies the other conditions of this paragraph (a), the plan must permit A to enroll in Option 2 as a special enrollee. (A may also be eligible to enroll in another group health plan, such as a plan maintained by the employer of A’s spouse, as a special enrollee.) The outcome would be the same if Option 1 was terminated by an issuer and the plan paid no other coverage available to A.

Example 3. (i) Facts. Individual C is covered under a group health plan maintained by Employer X. While covered under X’s plan, C was eligible for but did not enroll in a plan maintained by Employer Z, the employer of C’s spouse. C terminates employment with X and loses eligibility for coverage under X’s plan. C has a special enrollment right to enroll in Z’s plan, but C instead elects COBRA continuation coverage under X’s plan. C exhausts COBRA continuation coverage under X’s plan and requests special enrollment in Z’s plan.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 3, C has satisfied the conditions for special enrollment under paragraph (a)(3)(iii) of this section, and has satisfied the other conditions for special enrollment under paragraph (a)(2)(i) of this section. The special enrollment right that C had into Z’s plan immediately after the loss of eligibility for coverage under X’s plan was an offer of coverage under Z’s plan. When C later exhausts COBRA coverage under X’s plan, C has a second special enrollment right in Z’s plan.
(4) Applying for special enrollment and effective date of coverage—(1) A plan or issuer must allow an employee a period of at least 30 days after an event described in paragraph (a)(3) of this section to request enrollment (for the employee or the employee's dependent).

(ii) Coverage must begin no later than the first day of the first calendar month beginning after the date the plan or issuer receives the request for special enrollment.

(b) Special enrollment with respect to certain dependent beneficiaries—(1) In general. A group health plan, and a health insurance issuer offering health insurance coverage in connection with a group health plan, that makes coverage available with respect to dependents is required to permit individuals described in paragraph (b)(2) of this section to be enrolled for coverage in a benefit package under the terms of the plan. Paragraph (b)(3) of this section describes the required special enrollment period and the date by which coverage must begin. The special enrollment rights under this paragraph (b) apply without regard to the dates on which an individual would otherwise be able to enroll under the plan.

(2) Individuals eligible for special enrollment. An individual is described in this paragraph (b)(2) if the individual is otherwise eligible for coverage in a benefit package under the plan and if the individual is described in paragraph (b)(2)(i), (ii), (iii), (iv), (v), or (vi) of this section.

(i) Current employee only. A current employee is described in this paragraph (b)(2)(i) if a person becomes a dependent of the individual through marriage, birth, adoption, or placement for adoption.

(ii) Spouse of a participant only. An individual is described in this paragraph (b)(2)(ii) if either—

(A) The individual becomes the spouse of a participant; or

(B) The individual is a spouse of a participant and a child becomes a dependent of the participant through birth, adoption, or placement for adoption.

(iii) Current employee and spouse. A current employee and an individual who is or becomes a spouse of such an employee, are described in this paragraph (b)(2)(iii) if either—

(A) The employee and the spouse become married; or

(B) The employee and spouse are married and a child becomes a dependent of the employee through birth, adoption, or placement for adoption.

(iv) Dependent of a participant only. An individual is described in this paragraph (b)(2)(iv) if the individual is a dependent (as defined in §2590.701–2) of a participant and the individual has become a dependent of the participant through marriage, birth, adoption, or placement for adoption.

(v) Current employee and a new dependent. A current employee and an individual who is a dependent of the employee, are described in this paragraph (b)(2)(v) if the individual becomes a dependent of the employee through marriage, birth, adoption, or placement for adoption.

(vi) Current employee, spouse, and a new dependent. A current employee, the employee's spouse, and the employee's dependent are described in this paragraph (b)(2)(vi) if the dependent becomes a dependent of the employee through marriage, birth, adoption, or placement for adoption.

(3) Applying for special enrollment and effective date of coverage—(1) Request. A plan or issuer must allow an individual a period of at least 30 days after the date of the marriage, birth, adoption, or placement for adoption (or, if dependent coverage is not generally made available at the time of the marriage, birth, adoption, or placement for adoption, a period of at least 30 days after the date the plan makes dependent coverage generally available) to request enrollment (for the individual or the individual's dependent).

(ii) Reasonable procedures for special enrollment. [Reserved]

(iii) Date coverage must begin—(A) Marriage. In the case of marriage, coverage must begin no later than the first day of the first calendar month beginning after the date the plan or issuer receives the request for special enrollment.

(B) Birth, adoption, or placement for adoption. Coverage must begin in the case of a dependent's birth on the date
of birth and in the case of a dependent’s adoption or placement for adoption no later than the date of such adoption or placement for adoption (or, if dependent coverage is not made generally available at the time of the birth, adoption, or placement for adoption, the date the plan makes dependent coverage available).

(4) Examples. The rules of this paragraph (b) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) Facts. An employer maintains a group health plan that offers all employees employee-only coverage, employee-plus-spouse coverage, or family coverage. Under the terms of the plan, any employee may elect to enroll when first hired (with coverage beginning on the date of hire) or during an annual open enrollment period held each December (with coverage beginning the following January 1). Employee A is hired on September 3, A is married to B, and they have no children. On March 15 in the following year a child C is born to A and B. Before that date, A and B have not been enrolled in the plan.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 1, the conditions for special enrollment of an employee with a spouse and new dependent under paragraph (b)(2)(vi) of this section are satisfied. If A satisfies the conditions of paragraph (b)(3) of this section for requesting enrollment timely, the plan will satisfy this paragraph (b) if it allows A to enroll either with employee-only coverage, with employee-plus-spouse coverage (for A and B), or with family coverage (for A, B, and C). The plan must allow whatever coverage is chosen to begin on March 15, the date of C’s birth.

Example 2. (i) Facts. Individual D works for Employer X. X maintains a group health plan with two benefit packages—an HMO option and an indemnity option. Self-only and family coverage are available under both options. D enrolls for self-only coverage in the HMO option. Then, a child, E, is placed for adoption with Employer X. Within 30 days of the placement of E for adoption, D requests enrollment for E and D under the plan’s indemnity option.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 2, D and E satisfy the conditions for special enrollment under paragraphs (b)(2)(v) and (b)(3) of this section. Therefore, the plan must allow D and E to enroll in the indemnity coverage, effective as of the date of the placement for adoption.

(c) Notice of special enrollment. At or before the time an employee is initially offered the opportunity to enroll in a group health plan, the plan must furnish the employee with a notice of special enrollment that complies with the requirements of this paragraph (c).

(1) Description of special enrollment rights. The notice of special enrollment must include a description of special enrollment rights. The following model language may be used to satisfy this requirement:

If you are declining enrollment for yourself or your dependents (including your spouse) because of other health insurance or group health plan coverage, you may be able to enroll yourself and your dependents in this plan if you or your dependents lose eligibility for that other coverage (or if the employer stops contributing towards your or your dependents’ other coverage). However, you must request enrollment within (insert “30 days” or any longer period that applies under the plan) after your or your dependents’ other coverage ends (or after the employer stops contributing toward the other coverage).

In addition, if you have a new dependent as a result of marriage, birth, adoption, or placement for adoption, you may be able to enroll yourself and your dependents. However, you must request enrollment within (insert “30 days” or any longer period that applies under the plan) after the marriage, birth, adoption, or placement for adoption.

To request special enrollment or obtain more information, contact (insert the name, title, telephone number, and any additional contact information of the appropriate plan representative).

(2) Additional information that may be required. The notice of special enrollment must also include, if applicable, the notice described in paragraph (a)(3)(iv) of this section (the notice required to be furnished to an individual declining coverage if the plan requires the reason for declining coverage to be in writing).

(d) Treatment of special enrollees—(1) If an individual requests enrollment while the individual is entitled to special enrollment under either paragraph (a) or (b) of this section, the individual is a special enrollee, even if the request for enrollment coincides with a late enrollment opportunity under the plan. Therefore, the individual cannot be treated as a late enrollee.

(2) Special enrollees must be offered all the benefit packages available to similarly situated individuals who enroll when first eligible. For this purpose, any difference in benefits or cost-
sharing requirements for different individuals constitutes a different benefit package. In addition, a special enrollee cannot be required to pay more for coverage than a similarly situated individual who enrolls in the same coverage when first eligible.

(3) The rules of this section are illustrated by the following example:

Example. (1) Facts. Employer Y maintains a group health plan that has an enrollment period for late enrollees every November 1 through November 30 with coverage effective the following January 1. On October 18, Individual B loses coverage under another group health plan and satisfies the requirements of paragraphs (a)(2), (3), and (4) of this section. B submits a completed application for coverage on November 2.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example, B is a special enrollee. Therefore, even though B’s request for enrollment coincides with an open enrollment period, B’s coverage is required to be made effective no later than December 1 (rather than the plan’s January 1 effective date for late enrollees).


§ 2590.701–7 HMO affiliation period as an alternative to a preexisting condition exclusion.

The rules for HMO affiliation periods have been superseded by the prohibition on preexisting condition exclusions. See §2590.715–2704 for rules prohibiting the imposition of a preexisting condition exclusion.

[79 FR 10309, Feb. 24, 2014]

§ 2590.701–8 Interaction With the Family and Medical Leave Act. [Reserved]

§ 2590.702 Prohibiting discrimination against participants and beneficiaries based on a health factor.

(a) Health factors. (1) The term health factor means, in relation to an individual, any of the following health status-related factors:

(i) Health status;

(ii) Medical condition (including both physical and mental illnesses), as defined in §2590.701–2;

(iii) Claims experience;

(iv) Receipt of health care;

(v) Medical history;

(vi) Genetic information, as defined in §2590.702–1(a)(3) of this Part;

(vii) Evidence of insurability; or

(viii) Disability.

(2) Evidence of insurability includes—

(i) Conditions arising out of acts of domestic violence; and

(ii) Participation in activities such as motorcycling, snowmobiling, all-terrain vehicle riding, horseback riding, skiing, and other similar activities.

(3) The decision whether health coverage is elected for an individual (including the time chosen to enroll, such as under special enrollment or late enrollment) is not, itself, within the scope of any health factor. (However, under §2590.701–6, a plan or issuer must treat special enrollees the same as similarly situated individuals who are enrolled when first eligible.)

(b) Prohibited discrimination in rules for eligibility—(1) In general—(i) A group health plan, and a health insurance issuer offering health insurance coverage in connection with a group health plan, may not establish any rule for eligibility (including continued eligibility) of any individual to enroll for benefits under the terms of the plan or group health insurance coverage that discriminates based on any health factor that relates to that individual or a dependent of that individual. This rule is subject to the provisions of paragraph (b)(2) of this section (explaining how this rule applies to benefits), paragraph (d) of this section (containing rules for establishing groups of similarly situated individuals), paragraph (e) of this section (relating to non-confinement, actively-at-work, and other service requirements), paragraph (f) of this section (relating to wellness programs), and paragraph (g) of this section (permitting favorable treatment of individuals with adverse health factors).

(ii) For purposes of this section, rules for eligibility include, but are not limited to, rules relating to—

(A) Enrollment;

(B) The effective date of coverage;

(C) Waiting (or affiliation) periods;

(D) Late and special enrollment;

(E) Eligibility for benefit packages (including rules for individuals to change their selection among benefit packages);
(F) Benefits (including rules relating to covered benefits, benefit restrictions, and cost-sharing mechanisms such as coinsurance, copayments, and deductibles), as described in paragraphs (b)(2) and (3) of this section;

(G) Continued eligibility; and

(H) Terminating coverage (including disenrollment) of any individual under the plan.

(iii) The rules of this paragraph (b)(1) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) Facts. An employer sponsors a group health plan that is available to all employees who enroll within the first 30 days of their employment. However, employees who do not enroll within the first 30 days cannot enroll later unless they pass a physical examination.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 1, the requirement to pass a physical examination in order to enroll in the plan is a rule for eligibility that discriminates based on one or more health factors and thus violates this paragraph (b)(1).

Example 2. (i) Facts. Under an employer’s group health plan, employees who enroll during the first 30 days of employment (and during special enrollment periods) may choose between two benefit packages: an indemnity option and an HMO option. However, employees who enroll during late enrollment are permitted to enroll only in the HMO option and only if they provide evidence of good health.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 2, the requirement to provide evidence of good health in order to be eligible for late enrollment in the HMO option is a rule for eligibility that discriminates based on one or more health factors and thus violates this paragraph (b)(1).

Example 3. (i) Facts. Under an employer’s group health plan, all employees generally may enroll within the first 30 days of employment. However, individuals who participate in certain recreational activities, including motorcycling, are excluded from coverage.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 3, excluding from the plan individuals who participate in recreational activities, such as motorcycling, is a rule for eligibility that discriminates based on one more health factors and thus violates this paragraph (b)(1).

Example 4. (i) Facts. A group health plan applies for a group health policy offered by an issuer. As part of the application, the issuer receives health information about individuals to be covered under the plan. Individual A is an employee of the employer maintaining the plan. A and A’s dependents have a history of high health claims. Based on the information about A and A’s dependents, the issuer excludes A and A’s dependents from the group policy it offers to the employer.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 4, the issuer’s exclusion of A and A’s dependents from coverage is a rule for eligibility that discriminates based on one or more health factors, and thus violates this paragraph (b)(1). (If the employer is a small employer under 45 CFR 144.103 (generally, an employer with 50 or fewer employees), the issuer also may violate 45 CFR 146.150, which requires issuers to offer all the policies they sell in the small group market on a guaranteed available basis to all small employers and to accept every eligible individual in every small employer group.) If the plan provides coverage through this policy and does not provide equivalent coverage for A and A’s dependents through other means, the plan will also violate this paragraph (b)(1).

(2) Application to benefits—(i) General rule—(A) Under this section, a group health plan or group health insurance issuer is not required to provide coverage for any particular benefit to any group of similarly situated individuals.

(B) However, benefits provided under a plan must be uniformly available to all similarly situated individuals (as described in paragraph (d) of this section). Likewise, any restriction on a benefit or benefits must apply uniformly to all similarly situated individuals and must not be directed at individual participants or beneficiaries based on any health factor of the participants or beneficiaries (determined based on all the relevant facts and circumstances). Thus, for example, a plan may limit or exclude benefits in relation to a specific disease or condition, limit or exclude benefits for certain types of treatments or drugs, or limit or exclude benefits based on a determination of whether the benefits are
employees, or not medically necessary, but only if the benefit limitation or exclusion applies uniformly to all similarly situated individuals and is not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries based on any health factor of the participants or beneficiaries. In addition, a plan or issuer may require the satisfaction of a deductible, copayment, coinsurance, or other cost-sharing requirement in order to obtain a benefit if the limit or cost-sharing requirement applies uniformly to all similarly situated individuals and is not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries based on any health factor of the participants or beneficiaries. In the case of a cost-sharing requirement, see also paragraph (b)(2)(i) of this section, which permits variances in the application of a cost-sharing mechanism made available under a wellness program. (Whether any plan provision or practice with respect to benefits complies with this paragraph (b)(2)(i) does not affect whether the provision or practice is permitted under ERISA, the Affordable Care Act (including the requirements related to essential health benefits), the Americans with Disabilities Act, or any other law, whether State or Federal.)

(C) For purposes of this paragraph (b)(2)(i), a plan amendment applicable to all individuals in one or more groups of similarly situated individuals under the plan and made effective no earlier than the first day of the first plan year after the amendment is adopted is not considered to be directed at individual participants or beneficiaries.

(D) The rules of this paragraph (b)(2)(i) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) Facts. A group health plan applies a $10,000 annual limit on a specific covered benefit that is not an essential health benefit to each participant or beneficiary covered under the plan. The limit is not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 1, the limit does not violate this paragraph (b)(2)(i) because coverage of the specific, non-essential health benefit up to $10,000 is available uniformly to each participant and beneficiary under the plan and because the limit is applied uniformly to all participants and beneficiaries and is not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries.

Example 2. (i) Facts. A group health plan has a $500 deductible on all benefits for participants covered under the plan. Participant B files a claim for the treatment of AIDS. At the next corporate board meeting of the plan sponsor, the claim is discussed. Shortly thereafter, the plan is modified to impose a $2,000 deductible on benefits for the treatment of AIDS, effective before the beginning of the next plan year.

(ii) Conclusion. The facts of this Example 2 strongly suggest that the plan modification is directed at B based on B's claim. Absent outweighing evidence to the contrary, the plan violates this paragraph (b)(2)(i).

Example 3. (i) Facts. A group health plan applies for a group health policy offered by an issuer. Individual C is covered under the plan and has an adverse health condition. As part of the application, the issuer receives health information about the individuals to be covered, including information about C's adverse health condition. The policy form offered by the issuer generally provides benefits for the adverse health condition that C has, but in this case the issuer offers the plan a policy modified by a rider that excludes benefits for C for that condition. The exclusionary rider is made effective the first day of the next plan year.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 3, the issuer violates this paragraph (b)(2)(i) because benefits for C's condition are available to other individuals in the group of similarly situated individuals that includes C but are not available to C. Thus, the benefits are not uniformly available to all similarly situated individuals. Even though the exclusionary rider is made effective the first day of the next plan year, because the rider does not apply to all similarly situated individuals, the issuer violates this paragraph (b)(2)(i).

Example 4. (i) Facts. A group health plan has a $2,500 lifetime limit for the treatment of temporomandibular joint syndrome (TMJ). The limit is applied uniformly to all similarly situated individuals and is not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 4, the limit does not violate this paragraph (b)(2)(i) because $2,500 of benefits for the treatment of TMJ are available uniformly to all similarly situated individuals and a plan may limit benefits covered in relation to a specific disease or condition if the limit applies uniformly to all similarly situated individuals and is not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries. However, applying a lifetime limit on TMJ coverage on §2590.715-2711, if TMJ coverage is an essential health
benefit, depending on the essential health benefits benchmark plan as defined in 45 CFR 156.20. This example does not address whether the plan provision is permissible under any other applicable law, including PHS Act section 2711 or the Americans with Disabilities Act.)

Example 5. (i) Facts. A group health plan applies a $2 million lifetime limit on all benefits. However, the $2 million lifetime limit is reduced to $10,000 for any participant or beneficiary covered under the plan who has a congenital heart defect.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 5, the lower lifetime limit for participants and beneficiaries with a congenital heart defect violates this paragraph (b)(2)(i) because benefits under the plan are not uniformly available to all similarly situated individuals and the plan’s lifetime limit on benefits does not apply uniformly to all similarly situated individuals. Additionally, this plan provision is prohibited under §2590.715-2711 because it imposes a lifetime limit on essential health benefits.

Example 6. (i) Facts. A group health plan limits benefits for prescription drugs to those listed on a drug formulary. The limit is applied uniformly to all similarly situated individuals and is not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 6, the exclusion from coverage of drugs not listed on the drug formulary does not violate this paragraph (b)(2)(i) because benefits for prescription drugs listed on the formulary are uniformly available to all similarly situated individuals and because the exclusion of drugs not listed on the formulary applies uniformly to all similarly situated individuals and is not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries.

Example 7. (i) Facts. Under a group health plan, doctor visits are generally subject to a $250 annual deductible and 20 percent coinsurance requirement. However, prenatal doctor visits are not subject to any deductible or coinsurance requirement. These rules are applied uniformly to all similarly situated individuals and are not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 7, imposing different deductible and coinsurance requirements for prenatal doctor visits and other visits does not violate this paragraph (b)(2)(i) because a plan may establish different deductibles or coinsurance requirements for different services if the deductible or coinsurance requirement is applied uniformly to all similarly situated individuals and is not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries.

(ii) Exception for wellness programs. A group health plan or group health insurance issuer may vary benefits, including cost-sharing mechanisms (such as a deductible, copayment, or coinsurance), based on whether an individual has met the standards of a wellness program that satisfies the requirements of paragraph (f) of this section.

(iii) Specific rule relating to source-of-injury exclusions.—(A) If a group health plan or group health insurance coverage generally provides benefits for a type of injury, the plan or issuer may not deny benefits otherwise provided for treatment of the injury if the injury results from an act of domestic violence or a medical condition (including both physical and mental health conditions). This rule applies in the case of an injury resulting from a medical condition even if the condition is not diagnosed before the injury.

(B) The rules of this paragraph (b)(2)(iii) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) Facts. A group health plan generally provides medical/surgical benefits, including benefits for hospital stays, that are medically necessary. However, the plan excludes benefits for self-inflicted injuries or injuries sustained in connection with attempted suicide. Because of depression, Individual A attempts suicide. As a result, A sustains injuries and is hospitalized for treatment of the injuries. Under the exclusion, the plan denies A benefits for treatment of the injuries.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 1, the suicide attempt is the result of a medical condition (depression). Accordingly, the denial of benefits for the treatments of D’s injuries violates the requirements of paragraph (b)(2)(ii) because the plan provision excludes benefits for treatment of an injury resulting from a medical condition.

Example 2. (i) Facts. A group health plan provides benefits for head injuries generally. The plan also has a general exclusion for any injury sustained while participating in any of a number of recreational activities, including bungee jumping. However, this exclusion does not apply to any injury that results from a medical condition (nor from domestic violence). Participant E sustains a head injury while bungee jumping. The injury did not result from a medical condition (nor from domestic violence). Accordingly, the plan denies benefits for E’s head injury.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 2, the plan provision that denies benefits based on the source of an injury does not restrict benefits based on an act of domestic violence or any medical condition. Therefore, the provision
is permissible under this paragraph (b)(2)(iii) and does not violate this section. (However, if the plan did not allow E to enroll in the plan (or applied different rules for eligibility to E) because E frequently participates in bungee jumping, the plan would violate paragraph (b)(1) of this section.)

(c) Prohibited discrimination in premiums or contributions.—(1) In general—

(i) A group health plan, and a health insurance issuer offering health insurance coverage in connection with a group health plan, may not require an individual, as a condition of enrollment or continued enrollment under the plan or group health insurance coverage, to pay a premium or contribution that is greater than the premium or contribution for a similarly situated individual (described in paragraph (d) of this section) enrolled in the plan or group health insurance coverage based on any health factor that relates to the individual or a dependent of the individual.

(ii) Discounts, rebates, payments in kind, and any other premium differential mechanisms are taken into account in determining an individual’s premium or contribution rate. (For rules relating to cost-sharing mechanisms, see paragraph (b)(2) of this section (addressing benefits).)

(2) Rules relating to premium rates.—(i) Group rating based on health factors not restricted under this section. Nothing in this section restricts the aggregate amount that an employer may be charged for coverage under a group health plan. But see §2590.702-1(b) of this Part, which prohibits adjustments in group premium or contribution rates based on genetic information.

(ii) List billing based on a health factor prohibited. However, a group health insurance issuer, or a group health plan, may not quote or charge an employer (or an individual) a different premium for an individual in a group of similarly situated individuals based on a health factor. (But see paragraph (g) of this section permitting favorable treatment of individuals with adverse health factors.)

(iii) Examples. The rules of this paragraph (c)(2) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) Facts. An employer sponsors a group health plan and purchases coverage from a health insurance issuer. In order to determine the premium rate for the upcoming plan year, the issuer reviews the claims experience of individuals covered under the plan. The issuer finds that Individual F had significantly higher claims experience than similarly situated individuals in the plan. The issuer quotes the plan a higher per-participant rate because of F’s claims experience.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 1, the issuer does not violate the provisions of this paragraph (c)(2) because the issuer blends the rate so that the employer is not quoted a higher rate for F than for a similarly situated individual based on F’s claims experience. (However, if the issuer used genetic information in computing the group rate, it would violate §2590.702-1(b) of this Part.)

(3) Exception for wellness programs. Notwithstanding paragraphs (c)(1) and (2) of this section, a plan or issuer may vary the amount of premium or contribution it requires similarly situated individuals to pay based on whether an individual has met the standards of a wellness program that satisfies the requirements of paragraph (f) of this section.

(d) Similarly situated individuals. The requirements of this section apply only within a group of individuals who are treated as similarly situated individuals. A plan or issuer may treat participants as a group of similarly situated individuals separate from beneficiaries. In addition, participants may be treated as two or more distinct groups of similarly situated individuals and beneficiaries may be treated as two or more distinct groups of similarly situated individuals in accordance with the rules of this paragraph (d). Moreover, if individuals have a choice of two or more benefit packages, individuals choosing one benefit package may be treated as one or more groups of similarly situated individuals distinct from individuals choosing another benefit package.

(1) Participants. Subject to paragraph (d)(3) of this section, a plan or issuer may treat participants as two or more distinct groups of similarly situated individuals if the distinction between or among the groups of participants is based on a bona fide employment-based classification consistent with the employer’s usual business practice. Whether an employment-based classification is bona fide is determined on
the basis of all the relevant facts and circumstances. Relevant facts and circumstances include whether the employer uses the classification for purposes independent of qualification for health coverage (for example, determining eligibility for other employee benefits or determining other terms of employment). Subject to paragraph (d)(3) of this section, examples of classifications that, based on all the relevant facts and circumstances, may be bona fide include full-time versus part-time status, different geographic location, membership in a collective bargaining unit, date of hire, length of service, current employee versus former employee status, and different occupations. However, a classification based on any health factor is not a bona fide employment-based classification, unless the requirements of paragraph (g) of this section are satisfied (permitting favorable treatment of individuals with adverse health factors).

(2) Beneficiaries—(i) Subject to paragraph (d)(3) of this section, a plan or issuer may treat beneficiaries as two or more distinct groups of similarly situated individuals if the distinction between or among the groups of beneficiaries is based on any of the following factors:

(A) A bona fide employment-based classification of the participant through whom the beneficiary is receiving coverage;

(B) Relationship to the participant (for example, as a spouse or as a dependent child);

(C) Marital status;

(D) With respect to children of a participant, age or student status; or

(E) Any other factor if the factor is not a health factor.

(ii) Paragraph (d)(2)(i) of this section does not prevent more favorable treatment of individuals with adverse health factors in accordance with paragraph (g) of this section.

(3) Discrimination directed at individuals. Notwithstanding paragraphs (d)(1) and (2) of this section, if the creation or modification of an employment or coverage classification is directed at individual participants or beneficiaries based on any health factor of the participants or beneficiaries, the classification is not permitted under this paragraph (d), unless it is permitted under paragraph (g) of this section (permitting favorable treatment of individuals with adverse health factors). Thus, if an employer modified an employment-based classification to single out, based on a health factor, individual participants and beneficiaries and deny them health coverage, the new classification would not be permitted under this section.

(4) Examples. The rules of this paragraph (d) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) Facts. An employer sponsors a group health plan for full-time employees only. Under the plan (consistent with the employer's usual business practice), employees who normally work at least 30 hours per week are considered to be working full-time. Other employees are considered to be working part-time. There is no evidence to suggest that the classification is directed at individual participants or beneficiaries.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 1, treating the full-time and part-time employees as two separate groups of similarly situated individuals is permitted under this paragraph (d) because the classification is bona fide and is not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries.

Example 2. (i) Facts. Under a group health plan, coverage is made available to employees, their spouses, and their children. However, coverage is made available to a child only if the child is under age 26 (or under age 29 if the child is continuously enrolled full-time in an institution of higher learning (full-time students)). There is no evidence to suggest that these classifications are directed at individual participants or beneficiaries.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 2, treating spouses and children differently by imposing an age limitation on children, but not on spouses, is permitted under this paragraph (d). Specifically, the distinction between spouses and children is permitted under paragraph (d)(2) of this section and is not prohibited under paragraph (d)(3) of this section because it is not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries. It is also permissible to treat children who are under age 26 (or full-time students under age 29) as a group of similarly situated individuals separate from those who are age 26 or older (or age 29 or older if they are not full-time students) because the classification is permitted under paragraph (d)(2) of this section and is not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries.
Example 3. (i) Facts. A university sponsors a group health plan that provides one health benefit package to faculty and another health benefit package to other staff. Faculty and staff are treated differently with respect to other employee benefits such as retirement benefits and leaves of absence. There is no evidence to suggest that the distinction is directed at individual participants or beneficiaries.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 3, the classification is permitted under this paragraph (d) because there is a distinction based on a bona fide employment-based classification consistent with the employer’s usual business practice and the distinction is not directed at individual participants and beneficiaries.

Example 4. (i) Facts. An employer sponsors a group health plan that is available to all current employees. Former employees may also be eligible, but only if they complete a specified number of years of service, are enrolled under the plan at the time of termination of employment, and are continuously enrolled from that date. There is no evidence to suggest that these distinctions are directed at individual participants or beneficiaries.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 4, imposing additional eligibility requirements on former employees is permitted because a classification that distinguishes between current and former employees is a bona fide employment-based classification that is permitted under this paragraph (d), provided that it is not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries. In addition, it is permissible to distinguish between former employees who satisfy the service requirement and those who do not, provided that the distinction is not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries. (However, former employees who do not satisfy the eligibility criteria may, nonetheless, be eligible for continued coverage pursuant to a COBRA continuation provision or similar State law.)

Example 5. (i) Facts. An employer sponsors a group health plan that provides the same benefit package to all seven employees of the employer. Six of the seven employees have the same job title and responsibilities, but Employee G has a different job title and different responsibilities. After G files an expensive claim for benefits under the plan, coverage under the plan is modified so that employees with G’s job title receive a different benefit package that includes a higher deductible than in the benefit package made available to the other six employees.

(ii) Conclusion. Under the facts of this Example 5, changing the coverage classification for G based on the existing employment classification for G is not permitted under this paragraph (d) because the creation of the new coverage classification for G is directed at G based on one or more health factors.

(e) Nonconfinement and actively-at-work provisions—(1) Nonconfinement provisions—(i) General rule. Under the rules of paragraphs (b) and (c) of this section, a plan or issuer may not establish a rule for eligibility (as described in paragraph (b)(1)(ii) of this section) or set any individual’s premium or contribution rate based on whether an individual is confined to a hospital or other health care institution. In addition, under the rules of paragraphs (b) and (c) of this section, a plan or issuer may not establish a rule for eligibility or set any individual’s premium or contribution rate based on an individual’s ability to engage in normal life activities, except to the extent permitted under paragraphs (e)(2)(ii) and (3) of this section (permitting plans and issuers, under certain circumstances, to distinguish among employees based on the performance of services).

(ii) Examples. The rules of this paragraph (e)(1) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) Facts. Under a group health plan, coverage for employees and their dependents generally becomes effective on the first day of employment. However, coverage for a dependent who is confined to a hospital or other health care institution does not become effective until the confinement ends.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 1, the plan violates this paragraph (e)(1) because the plan delays the effective date of coverage for dependents based on confinement to a hospital or other health care institution.

Example 2. (i) Facts. In previous years, a group health plan has provided coverage through a group health insurance policy offered by Issuer M. However, for the current year, the plan provides coverage through a group health insurance policy offered by Issuer N. Under Issuer N’s policy, items and services provided in connection with the confinement of a dependent to a hospital or other health care institution are not covered if the confinement is covered under an extension of benefits clause from a previous health insurance issuer.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 2, Issuer N violates this paragraph (e)(1) because the group health insurance coverage restricts benefits (a rule for eligibility under paragraph (b)(1)) based on whether a dependent is confined to a hospital or other health care institution that is covered under an extension of benefits clause from a previous issuer. State law cannot change the obligation of Issuer N under this section. However,
under State law Issuer M may also be responsible for providing benefits to such a dependent. In a case in which Issuer N has an obligation under this section to provide benefits and Issuer M has an obligation under State law to provide benefits, any State laws designed to prevent more than 100% reimbursement, such as State coordination-of-benefits laws, continue to apply.

(2) Actively-at-work and continuous service provisions—(1) General rule—(A) Under the rules of paragraphs (b) and (c) of this section and subject to the exception for the first day of work described in paragraph (e)(2)(i) of this section, a plan or issuer may not establish a rule for eligibility (as described in paragraph (b)(1)(ii) of this section) or set any individual’s premium or contribution rate based on whether an individual is actively at work (including whether an individual is continuously employed), unless absence from work due to any health factor (such as being absent from work on sick leave) is treated, for purposes of the plan or health insurance coverage, as being actively at work.

(B) The rules of this paragraph (e)(2)(i) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) Facts. Under a group health plan, an employee generally becomes eligible to enroll 30 days after the first day of employment. However, if the employee is not actively at work on the first day after the end of the 30-day period, then eligibility for enrollment is delayed until the first day the employee is actively at work.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 1, the plan violates this paragraph (e)(2) (and thus also violates paragraph (b) of this section). However, the plan would not violate paragraph (e)(2) or (b) of this section if, under the plan, an absence due to any health factor is considered being actively at work.

Example 2. (i) Facts. Under a group health plan, coverage for an employee becomes effective after 90 days of continuous service; that is, if an employee is absent from work (for any reason) before completing 90 days of service, the beginning of the 90-day period is measured from the day the employee returns to work (without any credit for service before the absence).

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 2, the plan violates this paragraph (e)(2) (and thus also paragraph (b) of this section) because the 90-day continuous service requirement is a rule for eligibility based on whether an individual is actively at work. However, the plan would not violate this paragraph (e)(2) or paragraph (b) of this section if, under the plan, an absence due to any health factor is not considered an absence for purposes of measuring 90 days of continuous service. (In addition, any eligibility provision that is time-based must comply with the requirements of PHS Act section 2708 and its implementing regulations.)

(ii) Exception for the first day of work—(A) Notwithstanding the general rule in paragraph (e)(2)(i) of this section, a plan or issuer may establish a rule for eligibility that requires an individual to begin work for the employer sponsoring the plan (or, in the case of a multiemployer plan, to begin a job in covered employment) before coverage becomes effective, provided that such a rule for eligibility applies regardless of the reason for the absence.

(B) The rules of this paragraph (e)(2)(ii) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) Facts. Under the eligibility provision of a group health plan, coverage for new employees becomes effective on the first day that the employee reports to work. Individual H is scheduled to begin work on March 24. However, H is unable to begin work on that day because of illness. H begins working on August 4, and H’s coverage is effective on August 4.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 1, the plan provision does not violate this section. However, if coverage for individuals who do not report to work on the first day they were scheduled to work for a reason unrelated to a health factor (such as vacation or bereavement) becomes effective on the first day they were scheduled to work, then the plan would violate this section.

Example 2. (i) Facts. Under a group health plan, coverage for new employees becomes effective on the first day of the month following the employee’s first day of work, regardless of whether the employee is actively at work on the first day of the month. Individual J is scheduled to begin work on March 24. However, J is unable to begin work on March 24 because of illness. J begins working on April 7 and J’s coverage is effective May 1.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 2, the plan provision does not violate this section. However, as in Example 1, if coverage for individuals absent from work for reasons unrelated to a health factor became effective despite their absence, then the plan would violate this section.

(3) Relationship to plan provisions defining similarly situated individuals—(1) Notwithstanding the rules of paragraphs (e)(1) and (2) of this section, a
plan or issuer may establish rules for eligibility or set any individual’s premium or contribution rate in accordance with the rules relating to similarly situated individuals in paragraph (d) of this section. Accordingly, a plan or issuer may distinguish in rules for eligibility under the plan between full-time and part-time employees, between permanent and temporary or seasonal employees, between current and former employees, and between employees currently performing services and employees no longer performing services for the employer, subject to paragraph (d) of this section. However, other Federal or State laws (including the COBRA continuation provisions and the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993) may require an employee or the employee’s dependents to be offered coverage and set limits on the premium or contribution rate even though the employee is not performing services.

(ii) The rules of this paragraph (e)(3) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) Facts. Under a group health plan, employees are eligible for coverage if they perform services for the employer for 30 or more hours per week or if they are on paid leave (such as vacation, sick, or bereavement leave). Employees on unpaid leave are treated as a separate group of similarly situated individuals in accordance with the rules of paragraph (d) of this section. However, other Federal or State laws (including the COBRA continuation provisions and the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993) may require an employee or the employee’s dependents to be offered coverage and set limits on the premium or contribution rate even though the employee is not performing services.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 1, the plan provisions do not violate this section. However, if the plan treated individuals performing services for the employer for 30 or more hours per week, individuals on vacation leave, and individuals on bereavement leave as a group of similarly situated individuals separate from individuals on sick leave, the plan would violate this paragraph (e) and also violate paragraph (b) of this section because groups of similarly situated individuals cannot be established based on a health factor (including the taking of sick leave) under paragraph (d) of this section.

Example 2. (i) Facts. To be eligible for coverage under a bona fide collectively bargained group health plan in the current calendar quarter, the plan requires an individual to have worked 250 hours in covered employment during the three-month period that ends one month before the beginning of the current calendar quarter. The distinction between employees working at least 250 hours and those working less than 250 hours in the earlier three-month period is not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries based on any health factor of the participants or beneficiaries.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 2, the plan provision does not violate this section because, under the rules for similarly situated individuals allowing full-time employees to be treated differently than part-time employees, employees who work at least 250 hours in a three-month period can be treated differently than employees who fail to work 250 hours in that period. The result would be the same if the plan permitted individuals to apply excess hours from previous periods to satisfy the requirement for the current quarter.

Example 3. (i) Facts. Under a group health plan, coverage of an employee is terminated when the individual’s employment is terminated, in accordance with the rules of paragraph (d) of this section. Employee B has been covered under the plan. B experiences a disabling illness that prevents B from working. B takes a leave of absence under the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993. At the end of such leave, B terminates employment and consequently loses coverage under the plan. (This termination of coverage is without regard to whatever rights the employee (or members of the employee’s family) may have for COBRA continuation coverage.)

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 3, the plan provision terminating B’s coverage upon B’s termination of employment does not violate this section.

Example 4. (i) Facts. Under a group health plan, coverage of an employee is terminated when the employee ceases to perform services for the employer sponsoring the plan, in accordance with the rules of paragraph (d) of this section. Employee C is laid off for three months. When the layoff begins, C’s coverage under the plan is terminated. (This termination of coverage is without regard to whatever rights the employee (or members of the employee’s family) may have for COBRA continuation coverage.)

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 4, the plan provision terminating C’s coverage upon the cessation of C’s performance of services does not violate this section.

(f) Nondiscriminatory wellness programs—in general. A wellness program is a program of health promotion or disease prevention. Paragraphs (b)(2)(i)(I) and (c)(3) of this section provide exceptions to the general prohibition against discrimination based on a health factor for plan provisions that vary benefits (including cost-sharing mechanisms) or the premium or contribution for similarly situated individuals in connection with a wellness program that satisfies the requirements of this paragraph (f).
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(1) Definitions. The definitions in this paragraph (f)(1) govern in applying the provisions of this paragraph (f).

(i) Reward. Except where expressly provided otherwise, references in this section to an individual obtaining a reward include both obtaining a reward (such as a discount or rebate of a premium or contribution, a waiver of all or part of a cost-sharing mechanism, an additional benefit, or any financial or other incentive) and avoiding a penalty (such as the absence of a premium surcharge or other financial or nonfinancial disincentive). References in this section to a plan providing a reward include both providing a reward (such as a discount or rebate of a premium or contribution, a waiver of all or part of a cost-sharing mechanism, an additional benefit, or any financial or other incentive) and imposing a penalty (such as a surcharge or other financial or nonfinancial disincentive).

(ii) Participatory wellness programs. If none of the conditions for obtaining a reward under a wellness program is based on an individual satisfying a standard that is related to a health factor (or if a wellness program does not provide a reward), the wellness program is a participatory wellness program. Examples of participatory wellness programs are:

(A) A program that reimburses employees for all or part of the cost for membership in a fitness center.

(B) A diagnostic testing program that provides a reward for participation in that program and does not base any part of the reward on outcomes.

(C) A program that encourages preventive care through the waiver of the copayment or deductible requirement under a group health plan for the costs of, for example, prenatal care or well-baby visits. (Note that, with respect to non-grandfathered plans, §2590.715–213 of this part requires benefits for certain preventive health services without the imposition of cost sharing.)

(D) A program that reimburses employees for the costs of participating, or that otherwise provides a reward for participating, in a smoking cessation program without regard to whether the employee quits smoking.

(E) A program that provides a reward to employees for attending a monthly, no-cost health education seminar.

(F) A program that provides a reward to employees who complete a health risk assessment regarding current health status, without any further action (educational or otherwise) required by the employee with regard to the health issues identified as part of the assessment. (See also §2590.702–1 for rules prohibiting collection of genetic information.)

(iii) Health-contingent wellness programs. A health-contingent wellness program is a program that requires an individual to satisfy a standard related to a health factor to obtain a reward (or requires an individual to undertake more than a similarly situated individual based on a health factor in order to obtain the same reward). A health-contingent wellness program may be an activity-only wellness program or an outcome-based wellness program.

(iv) Activity-only wellness programs. An activity-only wellness program is a type of health-contingent wellness program that requires an individual to perform or complete an activity related to a health factor in order to obtain a reward but does not require the individual to attain or maintain a specific health outcome. Examples include walking, diet, or exercise programs, which some individuals may be unable to participate in or complete (or have difficulty participating in or completing) due to a health factor, such as severe asthma, pregnancy, or a recent surgery. See paragraph (f)(3) of this section for requirements applicable to activity-only wellness programs.

(v) Outcome-based wellness programs. An outcome-based wellness program is a type of health-contingent wellness program that requires an individual to attain or maintain a specific health outcome (such as not smoking or attaining certain results on biometric screenings) in order to obtain a reward. To comply with the rules of this paragraph (f), an outcome-based wellness program typically has two tiers. That is, for individuals who do not attain or maintain the specific health outcome, compliance with an educational program or an activity may be offered as
an alternative to achieve the same reward. This alternative pathway, however, does not mean that the overall program, which has an outcome-based component, is not an outcome-based wellness program. That is, if a measurement, test, or screening is used as part of an initial standard and individuals who meet the standard are granted the reward, the program is considered an outcome-based wellness program. For example, if a wellness program tests individuals for specified medical conditions or risk factors (including biometric screening such as testing for high cholesterol, high blood pressure, abnormal body mass index, or high glucose level) and provides a reward to individuals identified as within a normal or healthy range for these medical conditions or risk factors, while requiring individuals who are identified as outside the normal or healthy range (or at risk) to take additional steps (such as meeting with a health coach, taking a health or fitness course, adhering to a health improvement action plan, complying with a walking or exercise program, or complying with a health care provider’s plan of care) to obtain the same reward, the program is an outcome-based wellness program. See paragraph (f)(4) of this section for requirements applicable to outcome-based wellness programs.

(2) Requirement for participatory wellness programs. A participatory wellness program, as described in paragraph (f)(1)(ii) of this section, does not violate the provisions of this section only if participation in the program is made available to all similarly situated individuals, regardless of health status.

(3) Requirements for activity-only wellness programs. A health-contingent wellness program that is an activity-only wellness program, as described in paragraph (f)(1)(iv) of this section, does not violate the provisions of this section only if all of the following requirements are satisfied:

(i) Frequency of opportunity to qualify. The program must give individuals eligible for the program the opportunity to qualify for the reward under the program at least once per year.

(ii) Size of reward. The reward for the activity-only wellness program, together with the reward for other health-contingent wellness programs with respect to the plan, must not exceed the applicable percentage (as defined in paragraph (f)(5) of this section) of the total cost of employee-only coverage under the plan. However, if, in addition to employees, any class of dependents (such as spouses, or spouses and dependent children) may participate in the wellness program, the reward must not exceed the applicable percentage of the total cost of the coverage in which an employee and any dependents are enrolled. For purposes of this paragraph (f)(3)(ii), the cost of coverage is determined based on the total amount of employer and employee contributions towards the cost of coverage for the benefit package under which the employee is (or the employee and any dependents are) receiving coverage.

(iii) Reasonable design. The program must be reasonably designed to promote health or prevent disease. A program satisfies this standard if it has a reasonable chance of improving the health of, or preventing disease in, participating individuals, and it is not overly burdensome, is not a subterfuge for discriminating based on a health factor, and is not highly suspect in the method chosen to promote health or prevent disease. This determination is based on all the relevant facts and circumstances.

(iv) Uniform availability and reasonable alternative standards. The full reward under the activity-only wellness program must be available to all similarly situated individuals.

(A) Under this paragraph (f)(3)(iv), a reward under an activity-only wellness program is not available to all similarly situated individuals for a period unless the program meets both of the following requirements:

(1) The program allows a reasonable alternative standard (or waiver of the otherwise applicable standard) for obtaining the reward for any individual for whom, for that period, it is unreasonably difficult due to a medical condition to satisfy the otherwise applicable standard; and
(2) The program allows a reasonable alternative standard (or waiver of the otherwise applicable standard) for obtaining the reward for any individual for whom, for that period, it is medically inadvisable to attempt to satisfy the otherwise applicable standard.

(B) While plans and issuers are not required to determine a particular reasonable alternative standard in advance of an individual’s request for one, if an individual is described in either paragraph (f)(3)(iv)(A)(1) or (2) of this section, a reasonable alternative standard must be furnished by the plan or issuer upon the individual’s request or the condition for obtaining the reward must be waived.

(C) All the facts and circumstances are taken into account in determining whether a plan or issuer has furnished a reasonable alternative standard, including but not limited to the following:

(1) If the reasonable alternative standard is completion of an educational program, the plan or issuer must make the educational program available or assist the employee in finding such a program (instead of requiring an individual to find such a program unassisted), and may not require an individual to pay for the cost of the program.

(2) The time commitment required must be reasonable (for example, requiring attendance nightly at a one-hour class would be unreasonable).

(3) If the reasonable alternative standard is a diet program, the plan or issuer is not required to pay for the cost of food but must pay any membership or participation fee.

(4) If an individual’s personal physician states that a plan standard (including, if applicable, the recommendations of the plan’s medical professional) is not medically appropriate for that individual, the plan or issuer must provide a reasonable alternative standard that accommodates the recommendations of the individual’s personal physician with regard to medical appropriateness. Plans and issuers may impose standard cost sharing under the plan or coverage for medical items and services furnished pursuant to the physician’s recommendations.

(D) To the extent that a reasonable alternative standard under an activity-only wellness program is, itself, an activity-only wellness program, it must comply with the requirements of this paragraph (f)(3) in the same manner as if it were an initial program standard. (Thus, for example, if a plan or issuer provides a walking program as a reasonable alternative standard to a running program, individuals for whom it is unreasonably difficult due to a medical condition to complete the walking program (or for whom it is medically inadvisable to attempt to complete the walking program) must be provided a reasonable alternative standard to the walking program.) To the extent that a reasonable alternative standard under an activity-only wellness program is, itself, an outcome-based wellness program, it must comply with the requirements of paragraph (f)(4) of this section, including paragraph (f)(4)(iv)(D).

(E) If reasonable under the circumstances, a plan or issuer may seek verification, such as a statement from an individual’s personal physician, that a health factor makes it unreasonably difficult for the individual to satisfy, or medically inadvisable for the individual to attempt to satisfy, the otherwise applicable standard of an activity-only wellness program. Plans and issuers may seek verification with respect to requests for a reasonable alternative standard for which it is reasonable to determine that medical judgment is required to evaluate the validity of the request.

(v) Notice of availability of reasonable alternative standard. The plan or issuer must disclose in all plan materials describing the terms of an activity-only wellness program the availability of a reasonable alternative standard to qualify for the reward (and, if applicable, the possibility of waiver of the otherwise applicable standard), including contact information for obtaining a reasonable alternative standard and a statement that recommendations of an individual’s personal physician will be accommodated. If plan materials merely mention that such a program is available, without describing its terms, this disclosure is not required. Sample language is provided in paragraph (f)(6).
of this section, as well as in certain examples of this section.

(vi) Example. The provisions of this paragraph (f)(3) are illustrated by the following example:

Example. (i) Facts. A group health plan provides a reward to individuals who participate in a reasonable specified walking program. If it is unreasonably difficult due to a medical condition for an individual to participate (or if it is medically inadvisable for an individual to attempt to participate), the plan will waive the walking program requirement and provide the reward. All materials describing the terms of the walking program disclose the availability of the waiver.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example, the program satisfies the requirements of paragraph (f)(3)(iii) of this section because the walking program is reasonably designed to promote health and prevent disease. The program satisfies the requirements of paragraph (f)(3)(iv) of this section because the reward under the program is available to all similarly situated individuals. It accommodates individuals for whom it is unreasonably difficult to participate in the walking program due to a medical condition (or for whom it would be medically inadvisable to attempt to participate) by providing them with the reward even if they do not participate in the walking program (that is, by waiving the condition). The plan also complies with the disclosure requirement of paragraph (f)(3)(v) of this section. Thus, the plan satisfies paragraphs (f)(3)(iii), (iv), and (v) of this section.

(4) Requirements for outcome-based wellness programs. A health-contingent wellness program that is an outcome-based wellness program, as described in paragraph (f)(1)(v) of this section, does not meet the initial standard to qualify for the reward for any individual who does not meet the initial standard based on a measurement, test, or screening that is related to a health factor, a reasonable alternative standard based on the measurement, test, or screening that is related to a health factor, as explained in paragraph (f)(4)(iv) of this section.

(iv) Uniform availability and reasonable alternative standards. The full reward under the outcome-based wellness program must be available to all similarly situated individuals.

(A) Under this paragraph (f)(4)(iv), a reward under an outcome-based wellness program is not available to all similarly situated individuals for a period unless the program allows a reasonable alternative standard (or waiver of the otherwise applicable standard) for obtaining the reward for any individual who does not meet the initial standard based on a measurement, test, or screening, as described in this paragraph (f)(4)(iv).

(B) While plans and issuers are not required to determine a particular reasonable alternative standard in advance of an individual’s request for
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one, if an individual is described in paragraph (f)(4)(iv)(A) of this section, a reasonable alternative standard must be furnished by the plan or issuer upon the individual’s request or the condition for obtaining the reward must be waived.

(C) All the facts and circumstances are taken into account in determining whether a plan or issuer has furnished a reasonable alternative standard, including but not limited to the following:

(1) If the reasonable alternative standard is completion of an educational program, the plan or issuer must make the educational program available or assist the employee in finding such a program (instead of requiring an individual to find such a program unassisted), and may not require an individual to pay for the cost of the program.

(2) The time commitment required must be reasonable (for example, requiring attendance nightly at a one-hour class would be unreasonable).

(3) If the reasonable alternative standard is a diet program, the plan or issuer is not required to pay for the cost of food but must pay any membership or participation fee.

(4) If an individual’s personal physician states that a plan standard (including, if applicable, the recommendations of the plan’s medical professional) is not medically appropriate for that individual, the plan or issuer must provide a reasonable alternative standard that accommodates the recommendations of the individual’s personal physician with regard to medical appropriateness. Plans and issuers may impose standard cost sharing under the plan or coverage for medical items and services furnished pursuant to the physician’s recommendations.

(D) To the extent that a reasonable alternative standard under an outcome-based wellness program is, itself, an activity-only wellness program, it must comply with the requirements of paragraph (f)(3) of this section in the same manner as if it were an initial program standard. To the extent that a reasonable alternative standard under an outcome-based wellness program is, itself, another outcome-based wellness program, it must comply with the requirements of this paragraph (f)(4), subject to the following special provisions:

(1) The reasonable alternative standard cannot be a requirement to meet a different level of the same standard without additional time to comply that takes into account the individual’s circumstances. For example, if the initial standard is to achieve a BMI less than 30, the reasonable alternative standard cannot be to achieve a BMI less than 31 on that same date. However, if the initial standard is to achieve a BMI less than 30, a reasonable alternative standard for the individual could be to reduce the individual’s BMI by a small amount or small percentage, over a realistic period of time, such as within a year.

(2) An individual must be given the opportunity to comply with the recommendations of the individual’s personal physician as a second reasonable alternative standard to meeting the reasonable alternative standard defined by the plan or issuer, but only if the physician joins in the request. The individual can make a request to involve a personal physician’s recommendations at any time, and the personal physician can adjust the physician’s recommendations at any time, consistent with medical appropriateness.

(E) It is not reasonable to seek verification, such as a statement from an individual’s personal physician, under an outcome-based wellness program that a health factor makes it unreasonably difficult for the individual to satisfy, or medically inadvisable for the individual to attempt to satisfy, the otherwise applicable standard as a condition of providing a reasonable alternative to the initial standard. However, if a plan or issuer provides an alternative standard to the otherwise applicable measurement, test, or screening that involves an activity that is related to a health factor, then the rules of paragraph (f)(3) of this section for activity-only wellness programs apply to that component of the wellness program and the plan or issuer may, if reasonable under the circumstances, seek verification that it is unreasonably difficult due to a medical condition for an individual to perform or
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complete the activity (or it is medically inadvisable to attempt to perform or complete the activity). (For example, if an outcome-based wellness program requires participants to maintain a certain healthy weight and provides a diet and exercise program for individuals who do not meet the targeted weight, a plan or issuer may seek verification, as described in paragraph (f)(3)(iv)(D) of this section, if reasonable under the circumstances, that a second reasonable alternative standard is needed for certain individuals because, for those individuals, it would be unreasonably difficult due to a medical condition to comply, or medically advisable to attempt to comply, with the diet and exercise program, due to a medical condition.)

(y) Notice of availability of reasonable alternative standard. The plan or issuer must disclose in all plan materials describing the terms of an outcome-based wellness program, and in any disclosure that an individual did not satisfy an initial outcome-based standard, the availability of a reasonable alternative standard to qualify for the reward (and, if applicable, the possibility of waiver of the otherwise applicable standard), including contact information for obtaining a reasonable alternative standard and a statement that recommendations of an individual’s personal physician will be accommodated. If plan materials merely mention that such a program is available, without describing its terms, this disclosure is not required. Sample language is provided in paragraph (f)(6) of this section, as well as in certain examples of this section.

(vi) Examples. The provisions of this paragraph (f)(4) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1—Cholesterol screening with reasonable alternative standard to work with personal physician. (i) Facts. A group health plan offers a reward to participants who achieve a count under 200 on a total cholesterol test. If a participant does not achieve the targeted cholesterol count, the plan allows the participant to develop an alternative cholesterol action plan in conjunction with the participant’s personal physician that may include recommendations for medication and additional screening. The plan allows the physician to modify the standards, as medically necessary, over the year. (For example, if a participant develops asthma or depression, requires surgery and convalescence, or some other medical condition or consideration makes completion of the original action plan inadvisable or unreasonably difficult, the physician may modify the original action plan.) All plan materials describing the terms of the program include the following statement: “Your health plan wants to help you take charge of your health. Rewards are available to all employees who participate in our Cholesterol Awareness Wellness Program. If your total cholesterol count is under 200, you will receive the reward. If not, you will still have an opportunity to qualify for the reward. We will work with you and your doctor to find a Health Smart program that is right for you.” In addition, when any individual participant receives notification that his or her cholesterol count is 200 or higher, the notification includes the following statement: “Your plan offers a Health Smart program under which we will work with you and your doctor to try to lower your cholesterol. If you complete this program, you will qualify for a reward. Please contact us at [contact information] to get started.”

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 1, the program is an outcome-based wellness program because the initial standard requires an individual to attain or maintain a specific health outcome (a certain cholesterol level) to obtain a reward. The program satisfies the requirements of paragraph (f)(4)(iii) of this section because the cholesterol program is reasonably designed to promote health and prevent disease. The program satisfies the requirements of paragraph (f)(4)(iv) of this section because it makes available to all participants who do not meet the cholesterol standard a reasonable alternative standard to qualify for the reward. Lastly, the plan also discloses in all materials describing the terms of the program and in any disclosure that an individual did not satisfy the initial outcome-based standard the availability of a reasonable alternative standard (including contact information and the individual’s ability to involve his or her personal physician), as required by paragraph (f)(4)(v) of this section. Thus, the program satisfies the requirements of paragraphs (f)(4)(iii), (iv), and (v) of this section.

Example 2—Cholesterol screening with plan alternative and no opportunity for personal physician involvement. (i) Facts. Same facts as Example 1, except that the wellness program’s physician or nurse practitioner (rather than the individual’s personal physician) determines the alternative cholesterol action plan. The plan does not provide an opportunity for a participant’s personal physician to modify the action plan if it is not medically appropriate for that individual.
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(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 2, the wellness program does not satisfy the requirements of paragraph (f)(4)(iii) of this section because the program does not accommodate the participant’s personal physician with regard to medical appropriateness, as required under paragraph (f)(4)(iv)(C)(3) of this section. Thus, the program is unreasonably burdensome or impractical for individuals under paragraph (f)(4)(iv) of this section and is not available to all similarly situated individuals under paragraph (f)(4)(iv)(v) of this section. The notice also does not provide all the content required under paragraph (f)(4)(v) of this section.

Example 3—Cholesterol screening with plan alternative that can be modified by personal physician. (i) Facts. Same facts as Example 2, except that a participant’s personal physician disagrees with any part of the action plan, the personal physician may modify the action plan at any time, and the plan discloses this to participants.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 3, the wellness program satisfies the requirements of paragraph (f)(4)(iii) of this section because the participant’s personal physician may modify the action plan determined by the wellness program’s physician or nurse practitioner at any time if the physician states that the recommendations are not medically appropriate, as required under paragraph (f)(4)(iv)(iv)(v) of this section. Thus, the program is reasonably designed under paragraph (f)(4)(iv) of this section and is available to all similarly situated individuals under paragraph (f)(4)(iv)(v) of this section. The notice, which includes a statement that recommendations of an individual’s personal physician will be accommodated, also complies with paragraph (f)(4)(v) of this section.

Example 4—BMI screening with walking program alternative. (i) Facts. A group health plan will provide a reward to participants who have a body mass index (BMI) that is 26 or lower, determined shortly before the beginning of the year. Any participant who does not meet the target BMI is given the same discount if the participant complies with an exercise program that consists of walking 150 minutes a week. Any participant for whom it is medically inadvisable to attempt to comply with the walking program during the year is given the same discount if the participant satisfies an alternative standard that is reasonable taking into consideration the participant’s medical condition, is not unreasonably burdensome or impractical to comply with, and is otherwise reasonably designed based on all the relevant facts and circumstances. All plan materials describing the terms of the wellness program include the following statement: “Fitness is Easy! Start Walking! Your health plan cares about your health. If you are considered overweight because you have a BMI of over 26, our Start Walking program will help you lose weight and feel better. We will help you enroll. (**If your doctor says that walking isn’t right for you, that’s okay too. We will work with you (and, if you wish, your own doctor) to develop a wellness program that is right for you.) Participant E is unable to achieve a BMI that is 26 or lower within the plan’s timeframe and receives notification that he/she does not satisfy the BMI standard a reasonable alternative standard to qualify for the reward (in this case, a walking program that is not unreasonably burdensome or impractical for individuals to comply with and that is otherwise reasonably designed based on all the relevant facts and circumstances). In addition, the walking program is, itself, an activity-only standard and the plan complies with the requirements of paragraph (f)(3)(v) of this section (including the requirement of paragraph (f)(3)(v) that, if there are individuals for whom it is unreasonably difficult due to a medical condition to comply, or for whom it is medically inadvisable to attempt to comply with the walking program, the plan provide a reasonable alternative to those individuals). Moreover, the plan satisfies the requirements of paragraphs (f)(4)(iv)(v) of this section because it discloses, in all materials describing the terms of the program and in any disclosure that an individual did not satisfy the initial outcome-based standard, the availability of a reasonable alternative standard (including contact information and the individual’s option to involve his or her personal physician) to qualify for the reward or the possibility of waiver of the otherwise applicable standard. Thus, the program satisfies the requirements of paragraphs (f)(4)(ii), (iv), and (v) of this section.

Example 5—BMI screening with alternatives available to either lower BMI or meet personal goals. (i) Facts. Example 4, same facts as Example 4, except that if the participant states that an exercise program is not medically appropriate, as required under paragraph (f)(4)(iv)(v) of this section, the program discloses that the recommendations of an individual’s personal physician with regard to medical appropriateness are not taken into consideration at any time if the physician states that the recommendations are not medically appropriate, as required under paragraph (f)(4)(iv)(iv)(v) of this section. Thus, the program discloses, in all materials describing the terms of the program and in any disclosure that an individual did not satisfy the initial outcome-based standard, the availability of a reasonable alternative standard (including contact information and the individual’s option to involve his or her personal physician) to qualify for the reward or the possibility of waiver of the otherwise applicable standard. Thus, the program satisfies the requirements of paragraphs (f)(4)(ii), (iv), and (v) of this section.
physician’s recommendations. (1) Facts. Same facts as Example 4 except that, with respect to any participant who does not meet the target BMI, instead of a walking program, the participant is expected to reduce BMI by one point. At any point during the year upon request, any individual can obtain a second reasonable alternative standard, which is consistent with the recommendations of the participant’s personal physician regarding weight, diet, and exercise as set forth in a treatment plan that the physician recommends or to which the physician agrees. The participant’s personal physician is permitted to change or adjust the treatment plan at any time and the option of following the participant’s personal physician’s recommendations is clearly disclosed.

(2) Conclusion. In this Example 4, the reasonable alternative standard to qualify for the reward (the alternative BMI standard requiring a one-point reduction) does not make the program unreasonable under paragraph (f)(4)(iii) or (iv) of this section because the program complies with paragraph (f)(4)(iv)C of this section by allowing a second reasonable alternative standard to qualify for the reward (compliance with the recommendations of the participant’s personal physician, which can be changed or adjusted at any time). Accordingly, the program continues to satisfy the applicable requirements of paragraph (f) of this section.

Example 6—Tobacco use surcharge with smoking cessation program alternative. (1) Facts. In conjunction with an annual open enrollment period, a group health plan provides a premium differential based on tobacco use, determined using a health risk assessment. The following statement is included in all plan materials describing the tobacco premium differential: ‘‘Stop smoking today! We can help! If you are a smoker, we offer a smoking cessation program. If you complete the program, you can avoid this surcharge.’’ The plan accommodates participants who smoke by facilitating their enrollment in a smoking cessation program that requires participation at a time and place that are not unreasonably burdensome or impractical for participants, and that is otherwise reasonably designed based on all the relevant facts and circumstances, and discloses contact information and the individual’s option to involve his or her personal physician. The plan pays for the cost of participation in the smoking cessation program. Any participant can avoid the surcharge for the plan year by participating in the program, regardless of whether the participant stops smoking, but the plan can require a participant who wants to avoid the surcharge in a subsequent year to complete the smoking cessation program again.

(2) Conclusion. In this Example 6, the premium differential satisfies the requirements of paragraphs (f)(4)(iii), (iv), and (v). The program is an outcome-based wellness program because the initial standard for obtaining a reward is dependent on the results of a health risk assessment (a measurement, test, or screening). The program is reasonably designed under paragraph (f)(4)(iii) because the plan provides a reasonable alternative standard (as required under paragraph (f)(4)(iv) of this section) to qualify for the reward to all tobacco users (a smoking cessation program). The plan discloses, in all materials describing the terms of the program, the availability of the reasonable alternative standard (including contact information and the individual’s option to involve his or her personal physician). Thus, the program satisfies the requirements of paragraphs (f)(4)(ii), (iv), and (v) of this section.

Example 7—Tobacco use surcharge with alternative program requiring actual cessation. (1) Facts. Same facts as Example 6, except the plan does not provide participant F with the reward in subsequent years unless F actually stops smoking after participating in the smoking cessation program.

(2) Conclusion. In this Example 7, the program is not reasonably designed under paragraph (f)(4)(iii) of this section and does not provide a reasonable alternative standard as required under paragraph (f)(4)(iv) of this section. The plan cannot cease to provide a reasonable alternative standard merely because the participant did not stop smoking after participating in a smoking cessation program. The plan must continue to offer a reasonable alternative standard whether it is the same or different (such as a new recommendation from F’s personal physician or a new nicotine replacement therapy).

Example 8—Tobacco use surcharge with smoking cessation program alternative that is not reasonable. (1) Facts. Same facts as Example 6, except the plan does not facilitate participant F’s enrollment in a smoking cessation program. Instead the plan advises F to find a program, pay for it, and provide a certificate of completion to the plan.

(2) Conclusion. In this Example 8, the requirement for F to find and pay for F’s own smoking cessation program means that the alternative program is not reasonable. Accordingly, the plan has not offered a reasonable alternative standard that complies with paragraphs (f)(4)(iii) and (iv) of this section and the program fails to satisfy the requirements of paragraph (f) of this section.

(5) Applicable percentage—(1) For purposes of this paragraph (f), the applicable percentage is 30 percent, except that the applicable percentage is increased by an additional 20 percentage points (to 50 percent) to the extent that the additional percentage is in connection with a program designed to prevent or reduce tobacco use.
Example 4. (i) Facts. An employer sponsors a group health plan. The annual premium for employee-only coverage is $6,000 (of which the employer pays $4,500 per year and the employee pays $1,500 per year). The plan offers employees a health-contingent wellness program with several components, focused on exercise, blood sugar, weight, cholesterol, and blood pressure. The reward for compliance is an annual premium rebate of $600.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 4, even though the total reward for all wellness programs under the plan is $1,750 ($250 + $1,500 = $1,750, which exceeds the applicable percentage of 30 percent of the cost of the annual premium for employee-only coverage ($5,000 × 30% = $1,500)), only the reward offered for compliance with the health-contingent wellness program ($1,500) is taken into account in determining whether the rules of this paragraph (f)(5) are met. (The $250 reward is offered in connection with a participatory wellness program and therefore is not taken into account.) Accordingly, the health-contingent wellness program offers a reward that does not exceed the applicable percentage of 30 percent of the total annual cost of employee-only coverage.

(6) Sample language. The following language, or substantially similar language, can be used to satisfy the notice requirement of paragraphs (f)(3)(v) or (f)(4)(v) of this section: "Your health plan is committed to helping you achieve your best health. Rewards for participating in a wellness program are available to all employees. If you think you might be unable to meet a standard for a reward under this wellness program, you might qualify for an opportunity to earn the same reward by different means. Contact us at [insert contact information] and we will work with you (and, if you wish, with your doctor) to find a wellness program with the same reward that is right for you in light of your health status."
premium rates; these laws are not affected by this section.)

(ii) The rules of this paragraph (g)(1) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) Facts. An employer sponsors a group health plan that generally is available to employees, spouses of employees, and dependent children until age 26. However, dependent children who are disabled are eligible for coverage beyond age 26.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 1, the plan provision allowing coverage for disabled dependent children beyond age 26 satisfies this paragraph (g)(1) (and thus does not violate this section).

Example 2. (i) Facts. An employer sponsors a group health plan, which is generally available to employees (and members of the employee’s family) until the last day of the month in which the employee ceases to perform services for the employer. The plan generally charges employees $50 per month for employee-only coverage and $125 per month for family coverage. However, an employee who ceases to perform services for the employer by reason of disability may remain covered under the plan until the last day of the month that is 12 months after the month in which the employee ceased to perform services for the employer. During this extended period of coverage, the plan charges the employee $100 per month for employee-only coverage and $250 per month for family coverage. (This extended period of coverage is without regard to whatever rights the employee (or members of the employee’s family) may have for COBRA continuation coverage.)

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 2, the plan provision allowing extended coverage for disabled employees and their families satisfies this paragraph (g)(1) (and thus does not violate this section). In addition, the plan is permitted, under this paragraph (g)(1), to charge the disabled employees a higher premium during the extended period of coverage.

Example 3. (i) Facts. To comply with the requirements of a COBRA continuation provision, a group health plan generally makes COBRA continuation coverage available for a maximum period of 18 months in connection with a termination of employment but makes the coverage available for a maximum period of 29 months to certain disabled individuals and certain members of the disabled individual’s family. Although the plan generally requires payment of 102 percent of the applicable premium for the first 18 months of COBRA continuation coverage, the plan requires payment of 150 percent of the applicable premium for the disabled individual’s COBRA continuation coverage during the disability extension if the disabled individual would not be entitled to COBRA continuation coverage but for the disability.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 3, the plan provision allowing extended COBRA continuation coverage for disabled individuals satisfies this paragraph (g)(1) (and thus does not violate this section). In addition, the plan is permitted, under this paragraph (g)(1), to charge the disabled individuals a higher premium for the extended coverage if the individuals would not be eligible for COBRA continuation coverage were it not for the disability. (Similarly, if the plan provided an extended period of coverage for disabled individuals pursuant to State law or plan provision rather than pursuant to a COBRA continuation coverage provision, the plan could likewise charge the disabled individuals a higher premium for the extended coverage.)

(2) In premiums or contributions—(i) Nothing in this section prevents a group health plan or group health insurance issuer from charging individuals a premium or contribution that is less than the premium (or contribution) for similarly situated individuals if the lower charge is based on an adverse health factor, such as disability.

(ii) The rules of this paragraph (g)(2) are illustrated by the following example:

Example. (i) Facts. Under a group health plan, employees are generally required to pay $50 per month for employee-only coverage and $125 per month for family coverage under the plan. However, employees who are disabled receive coverage (whether employee-only or family coverage) under the plan free of charge.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example, the plan provision waiving premium payment for disabled employees is permitted under this paragraph (g)(2) (and thus does not violate this section).

(h) No effect on other laws. Compliance with this section is not determinative of compliance with any other provision of the Act (including the COBRA continuation provisions) or any other State or Federal law, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act. Therefore, although the rules of this section would not prohibit a plan or issuer from treating one group of similarly situated individuals differently from another (such as providing different benefit packages to current and former employees), other Federal or State laws may require that two separate groups of similarly situated individuals be treated the same for certain
purposes (such as making the same benefit package available to COBRA qualified beneficiaries as is made available to active employees). In addition, although this section generally does not impose new disclosure obligations on plans and issuers, this section does not affect any other laws, including those that require accurate disclosures and prohibit intentional misrepresentation.

(i) Applicability dates. This section applies for plan years beginning on or after July 1, 2007.


§ 2590.702–1 Additional requirements prohibiting discrimination based on genetic information.

(a) Definitions. Unless otherwise provided, the definitions in this paragraph (a) govern in applying the provisions of this section.

(1) Collect means, with respect to information, to request, require, or purchase such information.

(2) Family member means, with respect to an individual—

(i) A dependent (as defined for purposes of §2590.701–2 of this Part) of the individual; or

(ii) Any other person who is a first-degree, second-degree, third-degree, or fourth-degree relative of the individual or of a dependent of the individual. Relatives by affinity (such as by marriage or adoption) are treated the same as relatives by consanguinity (that is, relatives who share a common biological ancestor). In determining the degree of the relationship, relatives by less than full consanguinity (such as half-siblings, who share only one parent) are treated the same as relatives by full consanguinity (such as siblings who share both parents).

(A) First-degree relatives include parents, spouses, siblings, and children.

(B) Second-degree relatives include grandparents, grandchildren, aunts, uncles, nephews, and nieces.

(C) Third-degree relatives include great-grandparents, great-grandchildren, great aunts, great uncles, and first cousins.

(D) Fourth-degree relatives include great-great grandparents, great-great grandchildren, and children of first cousins.

(3) Genetic information means—

(i) Subject to paragraphs (a)(3)(ii) and (a)(3)(iii) of this section, with respect to an individual, information about—

(A) The individual’s genetic tests (as defined in paragraph (a)(5) of this section);

(B) The genetic tests of family members of the individual;

(C) The manifestation (as defined in paragraph (a)(6) of this section) of a disease or disorder in family members of the individual; or

(D) Any request for, or receipt of, genetic services (as defined in paragraph (a)(4) of this section), or participation in clinical research which includes genetic services, by the individual or any family member of the individual.

(ii) The term genetic information does not include information about the sex or age of any individual.

(iii) The term genetic information includes—

(A) With respect to a pregnant woman (or a family member of the pregnant woman), genetic information of any fetus carried by the pregnant woman; and

(B) With respect to an individual (or a family member of the individual) who is utilizing an assisted reproductive technology, genetic information of any embryo legally held by the individual or family member.

(4) Genetic services means—

(i) A genetic test, as defined in paragraph (a)(5) of this section;

(ii) Genetic counseling (including obtaining, interpreting, or assessing genetic information); or

(iii) Genetic education.

(5)(i) Genetic test means an analysis of human DNA, RNA, chromosomes, proteins, or metabolites, if the analysis detects genotypes, mutations, or chromosomal changes. However, a genetic test does not include an analysis of proteins or metabolites that is directly related to a manifested disease, disorder, or pathological condition. Accordingly, a test to determine whether an individual has a BRCA1 or BRCA2 variant is a genetic test. Similarly, a test to determine whether an individual has a genetic variant associated with hereditary nonpolyposis
colorectal cancer is a genetic test. However, an HIV test, complete blood count, cholesterol test, liver function test, or test for the presence of alcohol or drugs is not a genetic test.

(ii) The rules of this paragraph (a)(5) are illustrated by the following example:

Example. (i) Facts. Individual A is a newborn covered under a group health plan. A undergoes a phenylketonuria (PKU) screening, which measures the concentration of a metabolite, phenylalanine, in A’s blood. In PKU, a mutation occurs in the phenylalanine hydroxylase (PAH) gene which contains instructions for making the enzyme needed to break down the amino acid phenylalanine. Individuals with the mutation, who have a deficiency in the enzyme to break down phenylalanine, have high concentrations of phenylalanine.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example, the PKU screening is a genetic test with respect to A because the screening is an analysis of metabolites that detects a genetic mutation.

(6)(i) Manifestation or manifested means, with respect to a disease, disorder, or pathological condition, that an individual has been or could reasonably be diagnosed with the disease, disorder, or pathological condition by a health care professional with appropriate training and expertise in the field of medicine involved. For purposes of this section, a disease, disorder, or pathological condition is not manifested if a diagnosis is based principally on genetic information.

(ii) The rules of this paragraph (a)(6) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) Facts. Individual A has a family medical history of diabetes. A begins to experience excessive sweating, thirst, and fatigue. A’s physician examines A and orders blood glucose testing (which is not a genetic test). Based on the physician’s examination, A’s symptoms, and test results that show elevated levels of blood glucose, A’s physician diagnoses A as having adult onset diabetes mellitus (Type 2 diabetes).

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 1, A has been diagnosed by a health care professional with appropriate training and expertise in the field of medicine involved. The diagnosis is not based principally on genetic information. Thus, Type 2 diabetes is manifested with respect to A.

Example 2. (i) Facts. Individual B has several family members with colon cancer. One of them underwent genetic testing which detected a mutation in the MSH2 gene associated with hereditary nonpolyposis colorectal cancer (HNPCC). B’s physician, a health care professional with appropriate training and expertise in the field of medicine involved, recommends that B undergo targeted genetic testing to look for the specific mutation found in B’s relative to determine if B has an elevated risk for cancer. The genetic test with respect to B showed that B also carries the mutation and is at increased risk to develop colorectal and other cancers associated with HNPCC. B has a colonoscopy which indicates no signs of disease, and B has no symptoms.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 2, because B has no signs or symptoms of colorectal cancer, B has not been and could not reasonably be diagnosed with HNPCC. Thus, HNPCC is not manifested with respect to B.

Example 3. (i) Facts. Same facts as Example 2, except that B’s colonoscopy and subsequent tests indicate the presence of HNPCC. Based on the colonoscopy and subsequent test results, B’s physician makes a diagnosis of HNPCC.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 3, HNPCC is manifested with respect to B because a health care professional with appropriate training and expertise in the field of medicine involved has made a diagnosis that is not based principally on genetic information.

Example 4. (i) Facts. Individual C has a family member that has been diagnosed with Huntington’s Disease. A genetic test indicates that C has the Huntington’s Disease gene variant. At age 42, C begins suffering from occasional moodiness and disorientation, symptoms which are associated with Huntington’s Disease. C is examined by a neurologist (a physician with appropriate training and expertise for diagnosing Huntington’s Disease). The examination includes a clinical neurological exam. The results of the examination do not support a diagnosis of Huntington’s Disease.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 4, C is not and could not reasonably be diagnosed with Huntington’s Disease by a health care professional with appropriate training and expertise. Therefore, Huntington’s Disease is not manifested with respect to C.

Example 5. (i) Facts. Same facts as Example 4, except that C exhibits additional neurological and behavioral symptoms, and the results of the examination support a diagnosis of Huntington’s Disease with respect to C.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 5, C could reasonably be diagnosed with Huntington’s Disease by a health care professional with appropriate training and expertise. Therefore, Huntington’s Disease is manifested with respect to C.

(7) Underwriting purposes has the meaning given in paragraph (d)(1) of this section.
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(b) No group-based discrimination based on genetic information—(1) In general. For purposes of this section, a group health plan, and a health insurance issuer offering health insurance coverage in connection with a group health plan, must not adjust premium or contribution amounts for the plan, or any group of similarly situated individuals under the plan, on the basis of genetic information. For this purpose, “similarly situated individuals” are those described in §2590.702(d) of this Part.

(2) Rule of construction. Nothing in paragraph (b)(1) of this section (or in paragraph (d)(1) or (d)(2) of this section) limits the ability of a health insurance issuer offering health insurance coverage in connection with a group health plan to increase the premium for a group health plan or a group of similarly situated individuals under the plan based on the manifestation of a disease or disorder of an individual who is enrolled in the plan. In such a case, however, the manifestation of a disease or disorder in one individual cannot also be used as genetic information about other group members to further increase the premium for a group health plan or a group of similarly situated individuals under the plan.

(3) Examples. The rules of this paragraph (b) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) Facts. An employer sponsors a group health plan that provides coverage through a health insurance issuer. In order to determine the premium rate for the upcoming plan year, the issuer reviews the claims experience of individuals covered under the plan and other health status information of the individuals, including genetic information. The issuer finds that Employee A has made claims for treatment of polycystic kidney disease. A also has two dependent children covered under the plan. The issuer quotes the plan a higher per-participant rate because of both A’s claims experience and the family medical history of A’s children (that is, the fact that A has the disease).

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 1, the issuer violates the provisions of this paragraph (b) because, by taking the likelihood that A’s children may develop polycystic kidney disease into account in computing the rate for the plan, the issuer adjusts the premium based on genetic information relating to a condition that has not been manifested in A’s children. However, it is permissible for the issuer to increase the premium based on A’s claims experience.

(c) Limitation on requesting or requiring genetic testing—(1) General rule. Except as otherwise provided in this paragraph (c), a group health plan, and a health insurance issuer offering health insurance coverage in connection with a group health plan, must not request or require an individual or a family member of the individual to undergo a genetic test.

(2) Health care professional may recommend a genetic test. Nothing in paragraph (c)(1) of this section limits the authority of a health care professional who is providing health care services to an individual to request that the individual undergo a genetic test.

(3) Examples. The rules of paragraphs (c)(1) and (2) of this section are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) Facts. Individual A goes to a physician for a routine physical examination. The physician reviews A’s family medical history and A informs the physician that A’s mother has been diagnosed with Huntington’s Disease. The physician advises A that
Huntington’s Disease is hereditary and recommends that A undergo a genetic test.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 1, the physician is a health care professional who is providing health care services to A. Therefore, the physician’s recommendation that A undergo the genetic test does not violate this paragraph (c).

Example 2. (i) Facts. Individual B is covered by a health maintenance organization (HMO). B is a child being treated for leukemia. B’s physician, who is employed by the HMO, is considering a treatment plan that includes six-mercaptopurine, a drug for treating leukemia in most children. However, the drug could be fatal if taken by a small percentage of children with a particular gene variant. B’s physician recommends that B undergo a genetic test to detect this variant before proceeding with this course of treatment.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 2, even though the physician is employed by the HMO, the physician is nonetheless a health care professional who is providing health care services to B. Therefore, the physician’s recommendation that B undergo the genetic test does not violate this paragraph (c).

(4) Determination regarding payment. (i) In general. As provided in this paragraph (c)(4), nothing in paragraph (c)(1) of this section precludes a plan or issuer from obtaining and using the results of a genetic test in making a determination regarding payment. For this purpose, “payment” has the meaning given such term in 45 CFR 164.501 of the privacy regulations issued under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. Thus, if a plan or issuer conditions payment for an item or service on its medical appropriateness and the medical appropriateness of the item or service depends on the genetic makeup of a patient, then the plan or issuer is permitted to condition payment for the item or service and the genetic test. The plan or issuer may also refuse payment if the patient does not undergo the genetic test.

(ii) Limitation. A plan or issuer is permitted to request only the minimum amount of information necessary to make a determination regarding payment. The minimum amount of information necessary is determined in accordance with the minimum necessary standard in 45 CFR 164.502(b) of the privacy regulations issued under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. (iii) Examples. See paragraph (e) of this section for examples illustrating the rules of this paragraph (c)(4), as well as other provisions of this section.

(5) Research exception. Notwithstanding paragraph (c)(1) of this section, a plan or issuer may request, but not require, that a participant or beneficiary undergo a genetic test if all of the conditions of this paragraph (c)(5) are met:

(i) Research in accordance with Federal regulations and applicable State or local law or regulations. The plan or issuer makes the request pursuant to research, as defined in 45 CFR 46.102(d), that complies with 45 CFR Part 46 or equivalent Federal regulations, and any applicable State or local law or regulations for the protection of human subjects in research.

(ii) Written request for participation in research. The plan or issuer makes the request in writing, and the request clearly indicates to each participant or beneficiary (or, in the case of a minor child, to the legal guardian of the beneficiary) that—

(A) Compliance with the request is voluntary; and

(B) Noncompliance will have no effect on eligibility for benefits (as described in §2590.702(b)(1) of this Part) or premium or contribution amounts.

(iii) Prohibition on underwriting. No genetic information collected or acquired under this paragraph (c)(5) can be used for underwriting purposes (as described in paragraph (d)(1) of this section).

(iv) Notice to Federal agencies. The plan or issuer completes a copy of the “Notice of Research Exception under the Genetic Information Non-Discrimination Act” authorized by the Secretary and provides the notice to the address specified in the instructions thereto.

(d) Prohibitions on collection of genetic information—(1) For underwriting purposes—(i) General rule. A group health plan, and a health insurance issuer offering health insurance coverage in connection with a group health plan, must not collect (as defined in paragraph (a)(1) of this section) genetic information for underwriting purposes. See paragraph (e) of this section for examples illustrating the rules of this
(ii) Underwriting purposes defined. Subject to paragraph (d)(1)(iii) of this section, underwriting purposes means, with respect to any group health plan, or health insurance coverage offered in connection with a group health plan—

(A) Rules for, or determination of, eligibility (including enrollment and continued eligibility) for benefits under the plan or coverage as described in §2590.702(b)(1)(ii) of this Part (including changes in deductibles or other cost-sharing mechanisms in return for activities such as completing a health risk assessment or participating in a wellness program);

(B) The computation of premium or contribution amounts under the plan or coverage (including discounts, rebates, payments in kind, or other premium differential mechanisms in return for activities such as completing a health risk assessment or participating in a wellness program);

(C) The application of any pre-existing condition exclusion under the plan or coverage;

(D) Other activities related to the creation, renewal, or replacement of a contract of health insurance or health benefits.

(iii) Medical appropriateness. If an individual seeks a benefit under a group health plan or health insurance coverage, the plan or coverage may limit or exclude the benefit based on whether the benefit is medically appropriate, and the determination of whether the benefit is medically appropriate is not within the meaning of underwriting purposes. Accordingly, if an individual seeks a benefit under the plan and the plan or issuer conditions the benefit based on its medical appropriateness and the medical appropriateness of the benefit depends on genetic information of the individual, then the plan or issuer is permitted to condition the benefit on the genetic information. A plan or issuer is permitted to request only the minimum amount of genetic information necessary to determine medical appropriateness. The plan or issuer may deny the benefit if the patient does not provide the genetic information required to determine medical appropriateness. If an individual is not seeking a benefit, the medical appropriateness exception of this paragraph (d)(1)(iii) to the definition of underwriting purposes does not apply. See paragraph (e) of this section for examples illustrating the medical appropriateness provisions of this paragraph (d)(1)(iii), as well as other provisions of this section.

(2) Prior to or in connection with enrollment. (i) In general. A group health plan, and a health insurance issuer offering health insurance coverage in connection with a group health plan, must not collect genetic information with respect to any individual prior to that individual’s effective date of coverage under that plan or coverage, nor in connection with the rules for eligibility (as defined in §2590.702(b)(1)(ii) of this Part) that apply to that individual. Whether or not an individual’s information is collected prior to that individual’s effective date of coverage is determined at the time of collection.

(ii) Incidental collection exception—(A) In general. If a group health plan, or a health insurance issuer offering health insurance coverage in connection with a group health plan, obtains genetic information incidental to the collection of other information concerning any individual, the collection is not a violation of this paragraph (d)(2), as long as the collection is not for underwriting purposes in violation of paragraph (d)(1) of this section.

(B) Limitation. The incidental collection exception of this paragraph (d)(2)(ii) does not apply in connection with any collection where it is reasonable to anticipate that health information will be received, unless the collection explicitly states that genetic information should not be provided.

(3) Examples. The rules of this paragraph (d) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) Facts. A group health plan provides a premium reduction to enrollees who complete a health risk assessment. The health risk assessment is requested to be completed after enrollment. Whether or not it is completed or what responses are given on it has no effect on an individual’s enrollment status, or on the enrollment status of members of the individual’s family. The health risk assessment includes questions about the individual’s family medical history.
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(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 1, the health risk assessment includes a request for genetic information (that is, the individual’s family medical history). Because completing the health risk assessment may become eligible for additional benefits under the plan by being enrolled in a disease management program based solely on their answers to questions about a family’s medical history. Other people may become eligible for the disease management program based on determinations of medical appropriateness, the exception for determinations of medical appropriateness does not apply because the individual is not seeking benefits.

Example 5. (i) Facts. A group health plan requests enrollees to complete two distinct health risk assessments (HRAs) after and unrelated to enrollment. The first HRA instructs the individual to answer only for the plan offers a reward for completing the first HRA, which offers a reward, and no benefits or other rewards are conditioned on the request for genetic information in the second HRA. Consequently, the request for genetic information in the second HRA is not for underwriting purposes, and the two HRAs do not violate the prohibition on the collection of genetic information in this paragraph (d).

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 5, no genetic information is collected in connection with the first HRA, which offers a reward, and no benefits or other rewards are conditioned on the request for genetic information in the second HRA. Consequently, the request for genetic information in the second HRA is not for underwriting purposes, and the two HRAs do not violate the prohibition on the collection of genetic information in this paragraph (d).

Example 6. (i) Facts. A group health plan waives its annual deductible for enrollees who complete an HRA. The HRA is required to be completed after enrollment. Whether or not the HRA is completed or what responses are given on it has no effect on an individual’s enrollment status of members of the individual’s family. The HRA does not include any direct questions about the individual’s genetic information (including family medical history). However, the last question reads, “Is there anything else relevant to your health that you would like us to know or discuss with you?”

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 6, the plan’s request for medical information does not explicitly state that genetic information should not be provided. Therefore, any genetic information collected in response to the question is not within the incidental collection exception and is prohibited under this paragraph (d).

Example 7. (i) Facts. Same facts as Example 6, except that the last question goes on to state, “In answering this question, you should not include any genetic information. That is, please do not include any family medical history or any information related to genetic testing, genetic services, genetic counseling, or genetic diseases for which you believe you may be at risk.”

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 7, the plan’s request for medical information explicitly states that genetic information should not be provided. Therefore, any genetic information collected in response to the question is
within the incidental collection exception. However, the plan may not use any genetic information it obtains incidentally for underwriting purposes.

Example 8. (i) Facts. Issuer M acquires Issuer N. M requests N’s records, stating that N should not provide genetic information and should review the records to excise any genetic information. N assembles the data requested by M and, although N reviews it to delete genetic information, the data from a specific region included some individuals’ family medical history. Consequently, M receives genetic information about some of N’s covered individuals.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 8, M’s request for health information explicitly stated that genetic information should not be provided. Therefore, the collection of genetic information was within the incidental collection exception. However, M may not use the genetic information it obtained incidentally for underwriting purposes.

(e) Examples regarding determinations of medical appropriateness. The application of the rules of paragraphs (c) and (d) of this section to plan or issuer determinations of medical appropriateness is illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) Facts. Individual A’s group health plan covers genetic testing for celiac disease for individuals who have family members with this condition. After A’s son is diagnosed with celiac disease, A undergoes a genetic test and promptly submits a claim for the test to A’s issuer for reimbursement. The issuer asks A to provide the results of the genetic test before the claim is paid.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 1, under the rules of paragraph (c)(4) of this section the issuer is permitted to request only the minimum amount of information necessary to make a decision regarding payment. Because the results of the test are not necessary for the issuer to make a decision regarding the payment of A’s claim, the issuer’s request for the results of the genetic test violates paragraph (c) of this section.

Example 2. (i) Facts. Individual B’s group health plan covers a yearly mammogram for participants and beneficiaries starting at age 40, or at age 30 for those with increased risk for breast cancer, including individuals with BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene mutations. B is 33 years old and has the BRCA2 mutation. B undergoes a mammogram and promptly submits a claim to B’s plan for reimbursement. Following an established policy, the plan asks B for evidence of increased risk of breast cancer, such as the results of a genetic test or a family history of breast cancer, before the claim for the mammogram is paid. This policy is applied uniformly to all similarly situated individuals and is not directed at individuals based on any genetic information.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 2, the plan does not violate paragraphs (c) or (d) of this section. Under paragraph (c), the plan is permitted to request and use the results of a genetic test to make a determination regarding payment, provided the plan requests only the minimum amount of information necessary. Because the medical appropriateness of the mammogram depends on the genetic makeup of the patient, the minimum amount of information necessary includes the results of the genetic test. Similarly, the plan does not violate paragraph (d) of this section because the plan is permitted to request genetic information in making a determination regarding the medical appropriateness of a claim if the genetic information is necessary to make the determination (and if the genetic information is not used for underwriting purposes).

Example 3. (i) Facts. Individual C was previously diagnosed with and treated for breast cancer, which is currently in remission. In accordance with the recommendation of C’s physician, C has been taking a regular dose of tamoxifen to help prevent a recurrence. C’s group health plan adopts a new policy requiring patients taking tamoxifen to undergo a genetic test to ensure that tamoxifen is medically appropriate for their genetic makeup. In accordance with, at the time, the latest scientific research, tamoxifen is not helpful in up to 7 percent of breast cancer patients, those with certain variations of the gene for making the CYP2D6 enzyme. If a patient has a gene variant making tamoxifen not medically appropriate, the plan does not pay for the tamoxifen prescription.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 3, the plan does not violate paragraph (c) of this section if it conditions future payments for the tamoxifen prescription on C’s undergoing a genetic test to determine what genetic markers C has for making the CYP2D6 enzyme. Nor does the plan violate paragraph (c) of this section if the plan refuses future payment if the results of the genetic test indicate that tamoxifen is not medically appropriate for C.

Example 4. (i) Facts. A group health plan offers a diabetes disease management program to all similarly situated individuals for whom it is medically appropriate based on whether the individuals have or are at risk for diabetes. The program provides enhanced benefits related only to diabetes for individuals who qualify for the program. The plan sends out a notice to all participants that describes the diabetes disease management program and explains the terms for eligibility. Individuals interested in enrolling in the program are advised to contact the plan to demonstrate that they have diabetes or that they are at risk for diabetes. For individuals who do not currently have diabetes,
genetic information may be used to demonstrate that an individual is at risk.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 4, the plan may condition benefits under the disease management program upon a showing by an individual that the individual is at risk for diabetes, even if such showing may involve genetic information, provided that the plan requests genetic information only when necessary to make a determination regarding whether the disease management program is medically appropriate for the individual and only requests the minimum amount of information necessary to make that determination.

Example 5. (i) Facts. Same facts as Example 4, except that the plan includes a questionnaire that asks about the occurrence of diabetes in members of the individual’s family as part of the notice describing the disease management program.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 5, the plan violates the requirements of paragraph (d)(1) of this section because the requests for genetic information are not limited to those situations in which it is necessary to make a determination regarding whether the disease management program is medically appropriate for the individuals.

Example 6. (i) Facts. Same facts as Example 4, except the disease management program provides an enhanced benefit in the form of a lower annual deductible to individuals under the program; the lower deductible applies with respect to all medical expenses incurred by the individual. Thus, whether or not a claim relates to diabetes, the individual is provided with a lower deductible based on the individual providing the plan with genetic information.

(ii) Conclusion. In this Example 6, because the enhanced benefits include benefits not related to the determination of medical appropriateness, making available the enhanced benefits is within the meaning of underwriting purposes. Accordingly, the plan may not request or require genetic information (including family history information) in determining eligibility for enhanced benefits under the program because such a request would be for underwriting purposes and would violate paragraph (d)(1) of this section.

(f) Applicability date. This section applies for plan years beginning on or after December 7, 2009.

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