



# A Broker's Guide to 2021 Open Enrollment for Small Groups





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Preparation is key to a successful open enrollment. The best Brokers have a plan in place to make sure they can quote more business quickly and efficiently. Here's what you can expect this upcoming enrollment season, as well as useful tools and tips that will make it the best enrollment season yet.

## Changes Brought on by COVID-19

To address the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Biden administration announced a special enrollment period for ACA-compliant 2021 health coverage that began Feb. 15, 2021, and continues through Aug. 15, 2021. This is an extended deadline; it was originally scheduled to end in May 2021. This means that although open enrollment for 2021 coverage has ended, uninsured Americans have another opportunity to sign up for 2021 coverage. In many states, people who already have coverage are allowed to switch to a different plan in early 2021, without needing a qualifying event.

This enrollment window can be used by people who are uninsured or under-insured, as well as those who already have marketplace coverage and would prefer a different plan. It's available in every state that uses HealthCare.gov, which includes [36 states as of 2021](#). Additionally, there are COVID-related special enrollment periods being offered in state-run marketplaces operating their own enrollment websites.

Planning Group benefits for 2021 brought new challenges amid the pandemic. Many processes went virtual in an effort to practice social distancing and keep business moving. Group benefits meetings always have been a key component in a Broker's overall open enrollment strategy and serve as great opportunities to better understand a Group's needs, help them weigh coverage options and enroll in a plan. Only 33 percent of Brokers planned to do in-person meetings for coverage this year, down from 49 percent the year prior. To [make the most out of these virtual meetings](#), don't just "phone it in." Consider leveraging video conferencing technology to humanize the enrollment experience for your Small Groups.



Another shift brought on by COVID-19 was changes in Group size. Due to economic shutdowns and business hardships, millions of Employers were forced to temporarily lay off workers. While many of those Employees have since returned to work, things are not entirely back to pre-pandemic numbers. This means Brokers may be seeing a decrease in the number of Employees in Groups, which could affect their rates.

The 2021 calendar year saw increases to out-of-pocket dollar limits for high deductible plans (HDHPs) and health savings accounts (HSAs) to reflect inflation in the marketplace. [These changes](#) affected both self-coverage plans and family coverage plans. As [Brokers](#) prepare for open enrollment, it's important to educate [Small Groups](#) about the value of different benefits offerings, so they can not only utilize them, but also cut down on healthcare costs.

## Trends for Small Groups

In his [healthcare plan](#), President Biden says he plans “to build on the Affordable Care Act by giving Americans more choice, reducing healthcare costs and making our healthcare system less complex to navigate.” There are a few ways the Biden Plan [may affect Brokers and their Small Groups](#). It may:

- Reinstatement of the individual mandate. President Biden has said that he will bring back the penalty for not being covered under health insurance. This should not have much of an effect on Small Groups. Essentially, the individual mandate means that if people are covered under health plans offered by an Employer or a government program like Medicare, they can continue to be covered under those programs. However, people who are not covered and are not [exempt](#) must purchase health plans or pay the [shared responsibility payment](#) when filing federal income taxes.
- Enactment of a public option under the ACA. If a consumer is not satisfied with his or her current health insurance plan, whether he or she is covered under an Employer plan or purchases insurance on his or her own, President Biden plans to offer the choice to purchase a public health insurance option like Medicare. For Small Groups, this may bring relief to those struggling to afford coverage for Employees.
- Increase in tax credits to lower premiums. The President plans to ensure that people who receive insurance through the ACA marketplace will receive a higher tax credit than they currently do. Currently, families that make between 100 percent and 400 percent of the federal poverty level are eligible to receive a [tax credit](#) to reduce how much they have to pay for health insurance on the individual ACA marketplace. To make healthcare more affordable for more people, Biden plans to eliminate the 400 percent income cap on tax credit eligibility. He also plans to lower the limit on the cost of coverage from 9.86 percent to 8.5 percent.



With employees operating remotely, many Small Groups are rethinking the role of employee benefits like health insurance. In 2021 and beyond, benefits like healthcare are expected to play a much larger role. Here are few trends to watch when it comes to quoting and selling Small Group benefits.

- To combat rising premiums in an uncertain economy, many Small Groups may be looking to switch their insurance offerings to HDHPs. In addition to lower premiums, another incentive for your Small Groups to switch to an HDHP is that it can then be paired with an HSA. HSAs offer both Small Groups and their Employees [major advantages](#) like tax-free contributions and tax benefits.
- Telemedicine, or telehealth, has been a [growing trend](#) for some time but was further utilized during the pandemic. A [SHRM Employer survey](#) found that nearly all of the responding Employers planned to offer telehealth services for minor, acute services in 2021. In addition, 52 percent of those same Employers planned to offer more virtual care options in 2022 than they had in the past.
- In 2021, many Small Groups are taking a more holistic approach when it comes to healthcare by not only focusing on the physical health of their Employees, but also on their mental wellbeing. According to the aforementioned SHRM Employer survey, 88 percent of respondents planned to provide access to online mental health support resources in 2021.
- When it comes to ancillary benefits, expect to see Small Groups paying more attention to benefits that they may not otherwise have found as important or needed pre-pandemic, such as pet insurance and critical illness insurance.
- Businesses with at least 50 employees must offer the minimum essential health coverage that's affordable or pay a penalty. In 2021, that penalty increased: the adjusted \$2,000 amount increased to \$2,700; the adjusted \$3,000 amount increased to \$4,060.
- There is a continued migration from paper to digital. In a remote world, health insurance enrollment is no longer being conducted via paper forms. We saw this in the [open enrollment](#) period in fall 2020 and expect even more Brokers and their Small Groups to make the switch to digital in 2021.



## HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE ENROLLMENT PERIOD

### Know Your Audience

For Small Groups, offering benefits to employees has never been more crucial. They need an employee benefits provider that can not only help them deliver benefits that will attract top talent and retain quality employees, but also help them [combat the rising cost of healthcare.](#)

## HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE ENROLLMENT PERIOD

With many options available to Groups in today's competitive marketplace, Brokers must stand out from the competition. In order to win new business and [retain existing clients](#), Brokers need to streamline processes, reduce costs and ensure compliance for their Groups. This includes:

- Having an efficient digital solution for benefits equoting and enrollment, instead of relying on outdated, paper-based methods.
- Automating the data collection process through real-time quoting software. This move can increase your speed to market, allowing you to quote more efficiently as new rates become available.
- Using compliant and secure online portals to enter and store sensitive healthcare data, which can provide the data security Groups need to feel comfortable working with their Broker. Spending time getting to know their Groups to tailor their offerings. Ask your Groups about their budget and which benefits interest them most, then factor this information into available insurance plans to provide more relevant quotes that meet Groups' needs.
- Offer online plan elections to allow Groups to review and select a benefits package that fits their needs.







## HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE ENROLLMENT PERIOD

### Refresh Your Knowledge

Successful Brokers understand their Group's needs, provide education on insurance solutions and produce relevant quotes. As you go through your sales process, follow these five tips to close more health insurance sales:

- Understand the Group's needs: Ask about their challenges, their goals and their budget. This will not only help you close the deal but may even present [cross-selling opportunities](#) in the form of ancillary benefits like vision, dental and life insurance.
- Take time to explain industry terms: Your prospects may not be as fluent when it comes to insurance speak. Take the time to [explain industry jargon](#) in layman's terms, so they know exactly what the plans cover.
- Provide fully insured quotes fast: Automating the quoting of fully insured products with an ACA Quoting Tool can increase your speed to market and allow you to quote more efficiently as new rates become available.

## HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE ENROLLMENT PERIOD

- Streamline the collection of [medical health information](#): Filling out multiple medical health questionnaires is time consuming and frustrating for Groups. Using a software to eliminate the need for paper not only speeds up the process, but allows for quotes to be sent to more Carriers with no additional effort.
- Make the election process smoother: As a Broker, using an easy to tool for employees to [select their available plans](#) during open enrollment makes for a more efficient and user-friendly process for the Employee and Broker.
- Remember to follow up: Customer relationship management tools like [Business Intelligence Reporting](#) can help Brokers keep better track of leads, prospects and even current clients. Brokers can see where prospects are in the sales process, as well as which Groups are renewing. This will serve as a reminder to follow up with prospects to help you stay on track in the sales process.



### Stay Organized

From producing quotes to keeping track of applications, health insurance Brokers have a lot to juggle come open enrollment. Not having the right tools or technology can make it challenging to stay organized, especially when paper forms are being passed back and forth and multiple technology systems are in place.

FormFire's all-in-one digital software helps organize and keep track of everything from quote to close. Our document center eliminates the need for paperwork and messy filing cabinets by offering an organized and [secure](#) digital storage system for all of your files.

Throughout the open enrollment process, there may be employees who forget to complete FormFire account in a timely manner. Brokers can set up notifications that inform them when Employees sign off on their account so they can keep track of who is falling behind. FormFire allows Brokers to set up these notifications so they, and HR managers or business owners, are updated on a regular basis.

### Retain Existing Clients

From a cost perspective, retaining clients is five times cheaper than acquiring new ones, according to an [Invesp survey](#). In order to retain clients, you need to provide consistent value and positive experiences to the Groups you serve.

Don't just reach out to clients during renewal season or if there's a problem. Scheduling regular check-in calls can help keep your Groups in the loop about changes to their health plans, introduce new technology and address any ongoing Group management concerns.





## HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE ENROLLMENT PERIOD

Stay up-to-date on [new technology offerings](#), [employee benefits trends](#) and updates to health plans and Carrier offerings.

At the end of the day, if you can help Employers save time and energy while they find the right health plan, they'll be more likely to continue doing business with you. Look for ways you can leverage technology to streamline the quoting and enrollment processes for your Groups. [Transitioning from paper to digital data collection](#), improving the accuracy of the data transferred to the Carrier and [preloading information](#) are all ways Brokers can simplify and better manage the health insurance process for their Groups.





## TECHNOLOGY AND TRAINING FOR ENROLLMENT

Health insurance software are continuously making the Group Benefits process easier for Brokers to improve the customer experience. From quoting to enrollment, technology continues to seep into every aspect of the job. As you evaluate your software options, take into account what [CMS Wire](#) says today's insurance consumers are looking for:

- Cross-channel personalized experiences
- A seamless, consistent, connected journey
- Data accuracy, protection and privacy
- Choices in buying: where, when, how and who
- Interaction where, when and how they want
- Real-time interactions and responses.

Software essentials that every insurance Broker needs to have in order to meet these requirements include a customer relationship management (CRM) software; email automation software; [real-time insurance quoting software](#); a document management software system; customer service tools like live chat and automated chatbots; and a comprehensive insurance software, which can allow Brokers to provide a seamless, connected journey throughout the Group benefits process. The FormFire support team is here to provide Brokers and Employees alike with helpful assistance to navigate technology issues whenever they arise.





## Demo FormFire Today

FormFire is an all-in-one digital software that automates the health insurance process for Brokers from quote to close. With FormFire, Brokers can gain a competitive edge by quickly providing numerous quotes and streamlining the plan election and enrollment processes for clients. [Contact FormFire today](#) to learn more or [request a free demo](#).