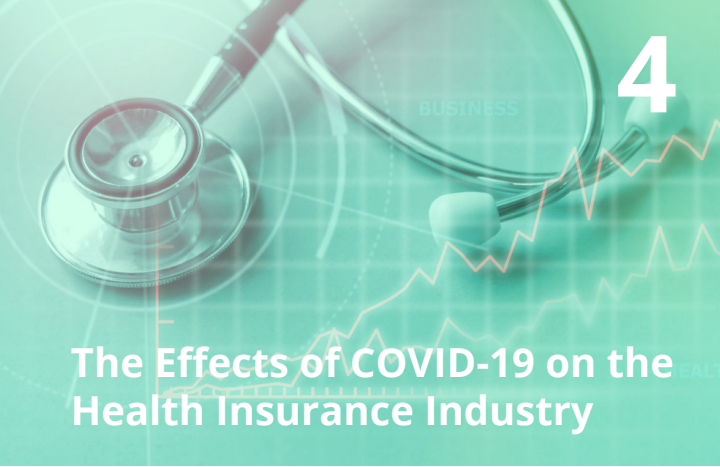


The Remote Broker's Guide to Navigating the New Normal





The Effects of COVID-19 on the Health Insurance Industry

4 Families First Coronavirus Response Act Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act

6 Open Enrollment



Transition to Virtual Enrollment: Digitizing Your Broker Agency



Ensure HIPAA and HITECH Compliance, Use a Two-Step Verification Process

14 Stay Current on Cybersecurity Trends, Consolidate Benefits Platforms

15 Navigate the New Normal

10 Quoting Medical Health Questionnaires and Plan Selection

11 Renewals, Error Check, e-Signatures

12 Ensuring Stringent Cybersecurity

The Remote Broker's Guide to Navigating the New Normal

There's a lot of uncertainty amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Many are questioning how long the pandemic will last and what the effects—both short-term and long-term—will be. While there is no way of knowing exactly what 2021 will have in store, the reality is, at least for the foreseeable future, many Brokers and their Small Groups will be operating remotely in the months ahead.

This guide helps Brokers navigate the “new normal” and shares insights on how to work better remotely. It will outline the effects that COVID-19 has had on the health insurance industry over this past year and how Brokers can effectively adapt to the remote environment transition while ensuring stringent cybersecurity every step of the way.



Families First Coronavirus Response Act

The first major legal change to Group health plans came in the form of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), which became effective on March 18, 2020. The FFCRA required Group health plans to cover FDA-approved products and services used in the testing and diagnosis of COVID-19.

Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act

In response to the economic impact of the pandemic, President Trump signed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act into federal law on March 27, 2020. The CARES Act provided approximately \$2 trillion in assistance to American households and businesses, which included \$100 billion in supplemental awards and grants for healthcare providers. The CARES Act included several provisions that affected Employer-sponsored Group health plans. These include:

COVID-19 Testing

The CARES Act expanded upon some provisions within the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) and provided additional guidance related to the amount that Group health plans must cover. Under the CARES Act, insurance coverage for COVID-19 testing applies on a first-dollar basis to private insurance plans. “First dollar” means that coverage must be without any cost-sharing, including deductibles, copayments or coinsurance. Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries can receive COVID-19 testing at no cost as well, and healthcare providers must publish their “cash price” for COVID-19 tests on a public website. It’s also important to note that under Notice 2020-15, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) also permits high-deductible health plans (HDHPs) to cover both COVID-19 testing and treatment on a first-dollar basis without making participants ineligible to make contributions to health savings accounts (HSAs).

Preventive Health Services

The CARES Act requires insurance coverage of preventative care intended to prevent or mitigate COVID-19. Currently, there are no preventative care options available. However, once COVID-19 preventative care, such as vaccines, becomes available, Group health plans must cover it on a first-dollar basis without any cost-sharing.

Over the Counter and Prescription Drugs

The CARES Act removed a restriction of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) for account-based plans, including flexible spending accounts (FSAs), HSAs and health reimbursement arrangements (HRAs). Under the CARES Act, these plans must reimburse the costs of over-the-counter medicines without a prescription. The CARES Act also requires that Medicare prescription drug plans and Medicare Advantage Part D plans allow up to a 90-day supply of prescription drugs during the COVID-19 emergency period.

Telehealth

With social distancing measures in place, many are turning to telehealth services. Through telehealth, patients are able to receive the care they need without having to physically go to a hospital or physician’s office. Due to the value of telehealth during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the CARES Act permits but does not require HDHPs with an HSA to waive cost-sharing for telehealth services prior to a patient reaching the deductible, without affecting the ability to make or receive HSA contributions.



Open Enrollment

Open enrollment looked a little different for Brokers this past year as well. With continued uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, planning Group benefits for 2021 was especially challenging. Here are some of the most notable changes seen during the 2021 open enrollment season.

Transition to Virtual Group Benefits Meetings

Group benefits meetings have always been a key component in a Brokers' overall open enrollment strategy. Often conducted face-to-face, these meetings serve as great opportunities to better understand your Small Groups' needs, help them weigh coverage options and enroll in a plan. One of the main challenges Brokers faced this past open enrollment season was learning how to give Groups the attention they need to make the best decisions possible, while maintaining safe practices to prevent the spread of COVID-19. For many Brokers, this meant conducting Group benefits meetings virtually. In fact, only 33 percent of Brokers planned to do in-person meetings this year, down from 49 percent last year.

Our advice for making the most out of these virtual meetings moving forward? Don't just "phone it in." Consider leveraging video conferencing technology to humanize the enrollment experience for your Small Groups. This will allow members to put a face to your name and give them the opportunity to ask any questions they may have in real-time. Additionally, you'll have the ability to share your screen, so you can present your proposals and show Groups side-by-side comparisons of plans and their rates.

Changes to Group Size

Due to the economic shutdowns across the country, millions of Employers were forced to temporarily lay off workers in the early months of the pandemic. While many of those Employees have since returned to work, the number of people who have permanently lost their job climbed to 4.5 million in September 2020. Unfortunately, this may have caused a decrease in the number of Employees in Small Groups, which may have affected their rates.

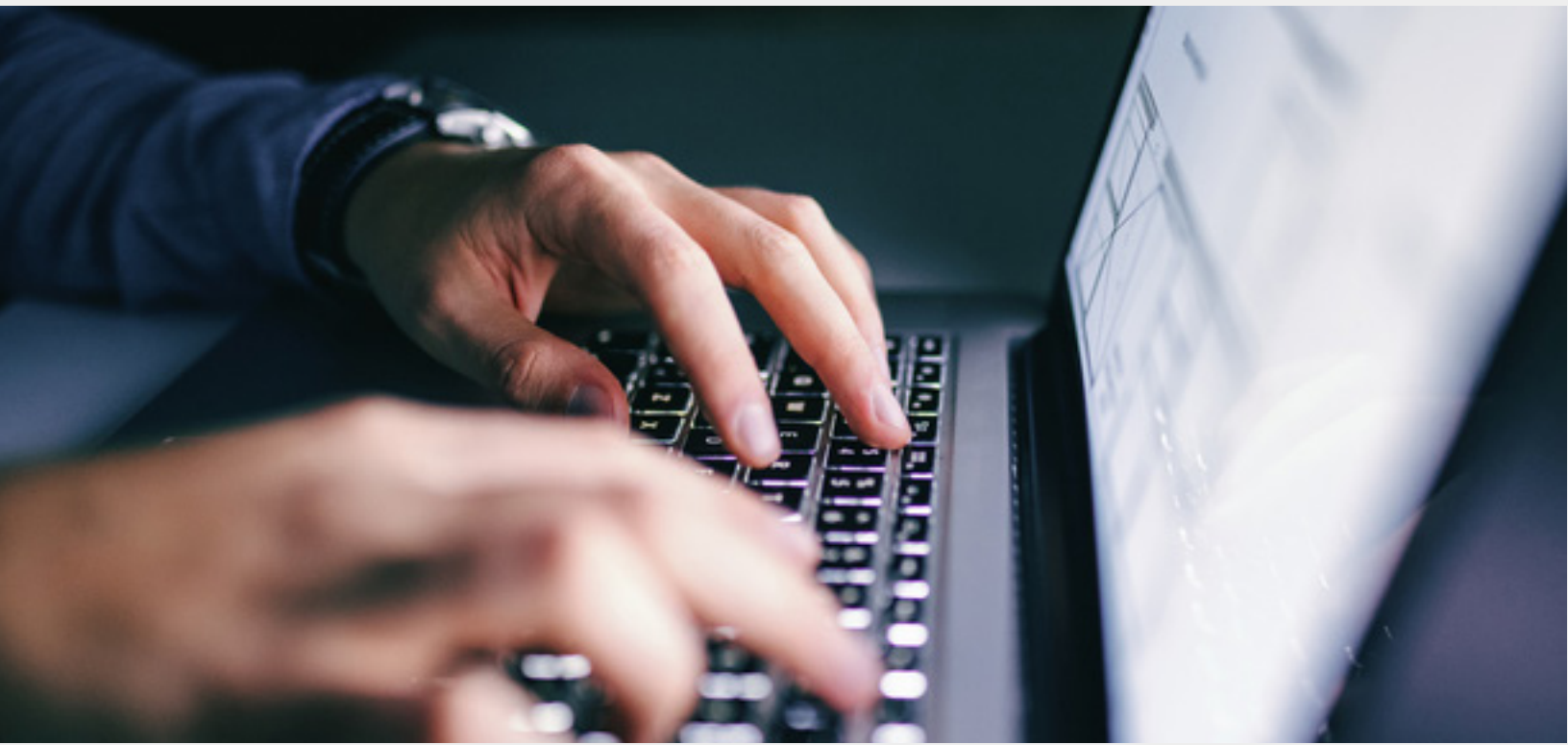
In these uncertain times, it will be wise to keep a close eye on your Small Groups' activity. To stay up to date, FormFire's Business Intelligence Reporting feature enables Brokers to see a snapshot of the number of Employees in each Group and their renewal date. Additionally, you'll be able to see which Groups are approaching renewal as well as provide your Groups with a better picture of their health.



More Groups Renewing Health Plans

As previously mentioned, these tough economic times have been challenging for Small Groups. In an effort to fight rising healthcare costs, some Groups shopped around this season to see if a new plan might equate to lower premiums.

Ultimately, though, many opted to renew their current plans, rather than make any drastic changes, as a way to maintain some type of normalcy in this unnatural time. According to Employee Benefit News, "Less than 10 percent of Employers recently surveyed say that they will make any change to their benefit offerings, indicating that employers want to maintain the status quo and keep benefits as a stable component of their overall total compensation package."



More Reliance on Technology

Even with a vaccine, experts predict it will still be a while before we return to a state of “normal.” The earliest Dr. Anthony Fauci predicts that, with widespread immunization, we could return to a “more normal version of life” is somewhere between April and July 2021. Others, however, predict it could be another year or two or even five before we’re back to pre-COVID conditions.

Nevertheless, our reliance on technology, the Wall Street Journal says, has been “permanently altered” thanks to the social distancing measures put in place amid the pandemic. This reliance on technology has been seen across industries and has affected health insurance Brokers and their Small Groups. As we continue to adapt to this “new normal,” it’s unlikely that things will ever fully go “back to 2019.” Rather, we expect even more Brokers and their Small Groups to place even greater value on technology in 2021 and the years ahead.

Transition to Virtual Enrollment: Digitizing Your Broker Experience

In today's remote environment, many paper-based processes have now become digitized. For Brokers, this requires an efficient digital solution for benefits enrollment and management, instead of relying on outdated, paper-based methods. According to Employee Benefit News, "Many Brokers have begun to leverage different technology platforms that are available in the marketplace, with some also making them available to their Employer clients."

Platforms like FormFire have been proven to streamline the enrollment process from quoting to enrollment for Brokers and their Small Groups. From collecting medical information to pulling rates from Carriers to presenting quotes to Groups, FormFire has everything Brokers need to keep business moving, even in these uncertain times.



ACA Quoting

Pulling rates from multiple Carriers can be very time consuming for Brokers. Using basic demographic information, FormFire can help streamline the fully insured quoting process. Whether it's health insurance, dental, vision or other ancillary benefits, Brokers can instantly gather quotes from multiple Carriers using FormFire's Quote Engine tool. Brokers can even narrow the list by state, making the process of pulling quotes for Small Groups quicker than ever.

Medical Health Questionnaires

With paper data collection, employees usually fill out a form for every Carrier, but with FormFire's Intelligent Employee Interview, Employees only have to fill out one application online that can then be mapped to match multiple Carrier forms. In addition, the information they provide stays in the system year over year, whereas they'd have to refill out paper forms. This saves Employees time and makes following years a matter of updating their information when necessary.

Plan Selection

With FormFire, Small Groups and their Employees have access to a simple online shopping-like benefits experience. FormFire will show Employees how many days they have left in their open enrollment period, as well as the date that their coverage begins. They'll also be able to choose from available benefits plans, through which they'll see:

- Plan Details
- Benefits Summary (PDF)
- Benefits Costs (monthly premiums)



Employees can then select from their available plans during open enrollment and make qualifying changes outside of open enrollment using our online marketplace tool. Employees benefit elections can be sent to the Carriers either via excel file or mapped to the required form.

Renewals

To streamline the renewal process, FormFire's Group Plan Assign tool enables Brokers to renew plans for Groups in bulk. With this tool, Brokers can assign plans to Employees who are not waiving coverage with just a few clicks.

Error Check

FormFire's error check technology saves Brokers time scrubbing applications manually by ensuring that when you get forms back from a Group, they are complete and accurate. No more going back and forth to gather missing information.

e-Signatures

To capture a legally binding signature, FormFire's eSignature saves time by allowing Employees to electronically sign using their mouse. This collects the digital signature required to seal the account as well as an electronic "wet" signature that can be populated on a paper application when required.



Ensuring Stringent Cybersecurity

As a Broker, you collect full names, dates of birth, social security numbers and medical information from every Employee in the Small Groups you serve. As you navigate the “new normal” and invest in Small Group Insurance Software, it will be crucial to ensure stringent security measures are in place, while educating Small Groups on cybersecurity best practices.



Ensure HIPAA and HITECH Compliance

The U.S. Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) are two federal laws that require healthcare organizations, including Brokers, to implement specific technical safeguards, including encryption and access controls, to protect confidential information, as well as disclose any data breaches. To verify a software's compliance with these security and privacy regulations, Brokers can ensure certification by the Health Information Trust Alliance (HITRUST) Common Security Framework (CSF). HITRUST CSF is a certifiable, information security framework that includes HIPAA and HITECH requirements, as well as ISO, PSI, NIST and more industry standards to help Brokers reduce risk through better information security. By verifying that a software is HITRUST compliant, you can ensure that unauthorized individuals cannot access or use confidential information, even if they are able to find the information in a database or network.



Use a Two-Step Verification Process

Two-factor authentication can help keep Broker and Small Group accounts and data safe from hackers. When logging into your account, users will be prompted to provide something you know (your password) and something you have (your phone or Security Key).

Your password, for example, should be strong, meaning it contains some combination of upper and lowercase letters, numerals and special characters. The second layer requires you to input a special PIN that gets sent to you via an email, SMS or an app to prevent an external person from accessing your insurance software and accounts. When two-factor checks are prompted at multiple touchpoints throughout the user's journey, Brokers can ensure that information within the software is only accessed by those who have been granted permission.



Stay Current on Cybersecurity Trends

As a Broker, your clients rely on you to be a trusted advisor. It is important, then, to keep a pulse on the current cybersecurity trends, as well as on potential threats, like ransomware attacks, happening within the healthcare industry.

For example, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reported an uptick in cyber criminals sending phishing emails in an attempt to takeover healthcare IT systems and steal information. Informing your Small Groups to be vigilant to these types of ransomware attacks can be the difference in protecting an Employee's sensitive medical information or getting hacked.

Consolidate Benefits Platforms

When it comes to the security of your Small Group Insurance Platforms, it is a numbers game. The more platforms you have for quoting, selling and enrolling, the greater your risk of a cybersecurity attack when transferring data between platforms.

To minimize the risk of compromising data, Brokers should look for a holistic digital platform for quoting, selling and enrolling Small Groups. A comprehensive insurance software can allow Brokers to not only provide a seamless, connected journey throughout the Group benefits process, but also ensure better protection of a Small Group's data.



Navigate the New Normal with FormFire

While a lot of uncertainty remains, it's important for Brokers to stay abreast of the developing pandemic. From keeping you informed of these changes and regulations to providing the necessary resources to ensure your Small Groups have the health coverage they need, FormFire is here to help you navigate the new normal.

With FormFire's all-in-one digital platform, Brokers can quickly pull rates, enroll Small Groups and renew health plans with just a few clicks. And because we're completely digital, everything from completing our medical health questionnaire (MHQ) to signing insurance forms can be done online.

[Request a Demo](#)

