

Retiree Health Program Nondiscrimination Requirements

Important Information on Welfare Plan Nondiscrimination Rules

AN EMPLOYER'S RETIREE HEALTH PROGRAM (I.E., VANTAGECARE RETIREMENT HEALTH SAVINGS (RHS) PLAN/401(H) RETIREE HEALTH ACCOUNT) will generally be covered by nondiscrimination requirements that are already applicable to the employer's other health and welfare plans (under Internal Revenue Code Section 105(h)).

However, please note that nondiscrimination requirements will not adversely impact your Retiree Health Program (Program) in the following scenarios:

- A. If the Program is limited to one or more collective bargaining groups that bargained regarding health benefits and the Program provides for fixed dollar contributions for all employees.
- B. If the Program limits reimbursements to insurance premiums only (health insurance premiums, Medicare supplemental insurance premiums, Medicare Part B insurance premiums COBRA insurance premiums, long-term care insurance premiums).

Premium-Only Programs are currently excluded from nondiscrimination testing. However, under the Affordable Care Act, Premium-Only Programs will likely be subject to nondiscrimination testing upon future IRS guidance.

If the Program does not fall into one of the two scenarios above, health and welfare nondiscrimination requirements may adversely impact your Plan.

Generally speaking, if your program does not fall under one of the two scenarios above, the following requirements apply:

1. An IRS-approved proportion of your employees must be covered. For instance, coverage must be extended to at least 70 percent of employees

(excluding part-time and seasonal employees, employees under age 25, employees with less than three years of service, and collectively bargained employees). Once the employer identifies the applicable coverage group, up to 30 percent of that group can be excluded.¹

2. Benefits must be provided on a substantially equal basis to all covered employees. What this means, in practical terms, is that contributions must be substantially equal for each participant, and thus cannot be determined as a percentage of compensation or based on age or years of service. A fixed dollar contribution would comply.

Please note that "failure" to meet the nondiscrimination requirements does not result in "disqualification" of the Program. The ramifications of not meeting the requirements are that "excess benefits" paid to "highly compensated individuals" that participate in the RHS plan are taxable as W-2 income to the participant.

An excess benefit is generally equal to the amount of the benefit made available to the highly compensated individuals but not made available to other employees. Highly compensated individuals will generally consist of the highest paid 25 percent of all employees.

What does all this mean?

Employers need to consider nondiscrimination requirements when developing their Program. The employer may want to consider talking to benefits counsel to determine if these rules will impact its participants. Should an employer establish a program that does not fall under scenario A or B above and does not meet the nondiscrimination requirements, the out-of-pocket expenses paid to highly compensated employees may be taxable.

You are encouraged to discuss the results with a tax or benefits advisor because the IRS rules are complex.

¹ There may be additional ways that your program would satisfy the nondiscrimination requirements of IRC § 105(h).