



Success Story

How Alameda County Employees' Retirement Association (ACERA) built a bridge to the future



The challenge

Retiree health options and costs had become unattractive to retirees and unsustainable for the steward of their benefit funds.

As the steward of the trust that funds health coverage for Alameda County retirees, ACERA is charged with providing cost-effective retiree health benefits. After assessing the coverage being provided for its 1,300 Medicare-eligible retirees and some dependents, ACERA identified a number of issues.

Given rising medical costs, the funds required to subsidize ACERA's retiree health benefits were shrinking at a considerable rate. **"The costs for our retiree group Medicare coverage were becoming unsustainable, and customer service was inadequate,"** says ACERA's assistant CEO, Kathy Foster. "We decided to explore other options that could provide comprehensive medical and prescription drug coverage at an affordable price, along with excellent customer service."

ACERA researched options extensively and presented recommendations to the board of directors and its internal retiree advocacy groups. Both approved the team's recommendations and selected Via Benefits, WTW's Individual Marketplace solution. "Transitioning to a marketplace was a multifaceted process. We had to explore the marketplace concept; convince our board, staff and members that this was the right direction; find the right marketplace; and educate and guide our members through enrollment," says Foster.

The solution

ACERA selected Via Benefits from a field of six other options presented in response to an RFP.

ACERA found that Via Benefits was a strong advocate for its retirees. Via Benefits provided one-on-one guidance as retirees selected individual health plan choices, and acted as an advocate in addressing insurance carrier issues and questions on the use of ACERA-provided funds.

ACERA provides a subsidy to its retirees via a health reimbursement account, which retirees use to pay for medical and prescription drug expenses. The reimbursement process took some getting used to, but retirees were helped by one-on-one counseling from Via Benefits' benefit advisors.

“Through the marketplace, we are able to provide our retirees a wide choice of high-quality Medicare plans as well as expert advice to help them choose among them. And we have confidence in the predictability and sustainability of the health benefits we will provide into the future.”

Kathy Foster, Assistant CEO, ACERA



The results

Savings for ACERA; increased plan choice, customer service and savings for county retirees.

In total, ACERA's retirees chose 214 plans from 55 carriers. Post-enrollment surveys show that 98% were satisfied with the service and the coverage they chose – 93% extremely so. Analysis showed average retiree savings between \$300 and \$1,500 per year, and ACERA would save approximately \$2 million in the first year, or nearly 25% per retiree.

One ACERA retiree shared this feedback: “Our benefit advisor was very patient and knowledgeable. We were given the information we needed, and our questions were answered. It was a pleasant experience.”

Another retiree said, “I would definitely recommend Via Benefits to anyone who may need to make changes in their health coverage. I was extremely pleased with the entire experience.”



Nearly **\$2 million**
first-year savings

Average savings of

\$300 to \$1,500
per retiree per year



Retirees experienced



Increased
plan value



More plan
choices



Superior
customer
service



[OptimizeRetireeBenefits.com](https://www.optimizeRetireeBenefits.com)

About Via Benefits by WTW

Via Benefits Insurance Services has helped more than two million people evaluate and enroll in individual health insurance. Via Benefits is a resource offering personal service to help retirees understand coverage options through a robust online experience supported by an award-winning customer service team. Founded in 2004, it operates the first and largest Medicare marketplace in the country and, in 2014, expanded to include individual and family plans for Pre-Medicare retirees.

