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Dear School District Superintendents, Business Managers, Payroll/Personnel/Human Resources:

As you know, last June the WEA Board of Directors approved conducting a market evaluation of our WEA Select Medical Plan to ensure that the program we endorse continues to meet the needs of our plan participants for years to come. Over the past several years health care reform has created a rapidly changing environment, including new approaches of providing benefits and accessing care. We want to be sure we are taking full advantage of these health care market innovations.

This process was kicked off in earnest last August, including a random sampling survey of plan participants to validate the evaluation criteria established by our Benefit Services Advisory Board (BSAB), the main work group in charge of the market evaluation. Key components of this criteria were:

- Cost
- Maximum Access to Providers
- Choice
- Member Experience

After identifying what participants consider the most important elements of a health care plan, the BSAB spent the next seven months, meeting numerous times, reviewing the insurance carrier proposals, including proposal responses, finalist presentations and site visits to the customer service centers.

Throughout this process it has been WEA's intent to consider a dual carrier model – two insurance carriers side-by-side, as compared to the single carrier model we have historically offered. We believe that the dual carrier model has the greatest possibility of providing our plan participants with:

- Choice in Physician/Hospital Networks – offering the highest degree of provider availability both from a broad Preferred Provider Organization (PPO) network standpoint as well as Alternative Networks
- Protection from rising costs
- Robust Tools, Resources and Technology
- Innovation
- Excellent Customer Service Models

In January the BSAB selected three carriers as finalists –Aetna, Premera and UnitedHealthcare. After thorough evaluation, the BSAB and Board of Directors have enthusiastically approved two carriers we believe represent the best future for our plans, the best member experience and opportunity for us to continue to innovate while controlling escalating health care costs for our plan participants, and for the program we endorse.

We are very pleased to announce that both **Aetna and UnitedHealthcare** will comprise the new WEA Select Medical program offering. This change will be **effective November 1, 2017**. In the meantime, everything stays exactly the same. Your employees currently on the WEA Select plans will continue to receive their benefits through Premera Blue Cross, and you will continue to utilize the Aon Hewitt Benefit Administration system for eligibility and billing.

This dual carrier offering provides WEA Select participants with the choice environment they have been requesting. All participants will be able to select between two of the largest, and most successful national insurance carriers – both of whom have an extremely strong presence in Washington State, bringing to bear national resources with local delivery. The new WEA Select offering will include:

Network Choices – Plan participants will have the choice between two broad statewide PPO networks and two alternative networks. The alternative networks provide monthly premium cost savings and different approaches of accessing care. They have the potential to reduce health care costs, which could have a positive impact on our future rates. More details about these networks will be provided in future communications.

Powerful Tools and Resources – Including real-time cost estimators for medical and prescription drug services, advanced provider search tools, wellness apps, access to a robust weight loss program, and high-touch “centers of excellence” customer service centers.

We are very excited about the future of our endorsed program! The BSAB will now turn their attention to finalizing rates for the 2017-18 plan year. This will be presented to the WEA Board for approval at a future meeting, and it's important to note that the intent with this new carrier offering is to leave the benefit design essentially the same for the plan year beginning November 1st.

We realize that you and your employees will have many questions about the transition over the next seven months before the new carriers become effective. With the Board's decision now made, we will continue to work through your questions in earnest and provide frequent updates. A separate announcement will be sent directly to all current WEA Select Medical Plan subscribers this week.

We want to sincerely thank Premera for the service they have provided to our plan participants for literally decades. We have enjoyed a positive and long term business relationship with them that has helped us bring the value of “WEA Select” to our school employees. We will work diligently to make sure this transition is as smooth as possible for you and your employees, as we now look forward to the next chapter of our medical program endorsement.

Next Steps

Beginning June 1, (five months in advance of the effective date), **Aetna and UnitedHealthcare will open their customer service hot lines and WEA specific websites** for prospective members to get information regarding physicians, hospitals, prescriptions, and other transition of care questions. You can expect to receive additional updates as the new program details are finalized.



Kim Mead
WEA President