

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA  
SESSION 2021

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SENATE BILL 228  
Commerce and Insurance Committee Substitute Adopted 4/28/21  
Health Care Committee Substitute Adopted 4/29/21

Short Title: Allow Employers to Offer EPO Benefit Plans.

(Public)

Sponsors:

Referred to:

March 11, 2021

1 A BILL TO BE ENTITLED  
2 AN ACT TO LOWER HEALTH CARE COSTS AND EXPAND ACCESS BY ALLOWING  
3 SMALL BUSINESSES TO OFFER EXCLUSIVE PROVIDER BENEFIT PLANS.

4 The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

5 SECTION 1. Article 50 of Chapter 58 of the General Statutes is amended by adding  
6 two new sections to read:

7 **"§ 58-50-56.1. Exclusive provider organizations, exclusive provider benefit plans.**

8 (a) Definitions. – The following definitions apply in this section:

9 (1) Exclusive provider benefit plan. – A health benefit plan offered by an insurer  
10 in which insureds must receive covered services from health care providers  
11 who are under a contract with the insurer and under which there is no  
12 requirement of coverage for care received from a health care provider who is  
13 not under contract with the insurer, except for emergency services as required  
14 by G.S. 58-3-190 and medically necessary covered services as required by  
15 G.S. 58-3-200(d).

16 (2) Exclusive provider organization or EPO. – An insurer holding contracts with  
17 providers to be used by or offered to insurers offering exclusive provider  
18 benefit plans.

19 (3) Insurer. – An insurer or service corporation subject to this Chapter.

20 (4) Participating provider. – A health care provider who has agreed to accept  
21 special reimbursement or other terms for health care services from an insurer  
22 for health care services; however, a participating provider is not a health care  
23 provider participating in any prepaid health service or capitation arrangement  
24 implemented or administered by the Department of Health and Human  
25 Services or its representatives.

26 (b) Insurers may enter into contracts for an exclusive provider organization with licensed  
27 health care providers of all kinds without regard to specialty of services or limitation to a specific  
28 type of practice. A contract for an exclusive provider organization that is not disapproved by the  
29 Commissioner within 90 days of its filing by the insurer shall be deemed to be approved.

30 (c) Any provision of a contract between an insurer offering an exclusive provider benefit  
31 plan and a health care provider that restricts the provider's right to enter into provider contracts  
32 with other persons is prohibited, is void ab initio, and is not enforceable. The existence of that  
33 restriction does not invalidate any other provision of the contract.

34 (d) Every insurer offering an exclusive provider benefit plan and contracting with an EPO  
35 shall require by contract that the EPO provide all of the participating providers with whom it



1 holds contracts information about the insurer and the insurer's exclusive provider benefit plans.  
2 This information shall include for each insurer and participating provider benefit plan the benefit  
3 designs and incentives that are used to encourage insureds to use participating providers.

4 (e) The Commissioner's rules adopted and applicable for preferred provider  
5 organizations related to provider accessibility for the insured group, adequacy of providers,  
6 availability of services at reasonable times, and financial solvency shall apply for exclusive  
7 provider organizations.

8 (f) Each insurer offering an exclusive provider benefit plan shall provide the  
9 Commissioner with summary data about the financial reimbursements offered to health care  
10 providers. All such insurers shall annually disclose the following information:

11 (1) The name by which the exclusive provider benefit plan is known and its  
12 business address.

13 (2) The name, address, and nature of any separate organization that administers  
14 any preferred provider benefit plan for the insurer.

15 (3) The terms of the agreements entered into by the insurer with providers in an  
16 exclusive provider organization.

17 (4) Any other information necessary to determine compliance with this section,  
18 rules adopted under this section, or other requirements applicable to preferred  
19 provider benefit plans.

20 (g) Each insurer shall include a clear statement in any application and any benefit  
21 booklets for exclusive provider benefit plans that out-of-network coverage for insureds in the  
22 exclusive provider benefit plan only applies for (i) emergency services and (ii) medically  
23 necessary covered services when an in-network provider is not reasonably available.

24 (h) Any provisions of this Chapter that apply to preferred provider benefit plans or  
25 preferred provider organizations as of July 1, 2021, shall also apply to exclusive provider benefit  
26 plans or exclusive provider organizations.

27 **"§ 58-50-56.2. Exclusive provider organization continuity of care.**

28 (a) Definitions. – The following definitions apply in this section:

29 (1) Ongoing special condition. – One of the following conditions:

30 a. An acute illness that is serious enough to require medical care or  
31 treatment to avoid a reasonable possibility of death or permanent harm.

32 b. A chronic illness, disease, or condition that is life-threatening,  
33 degenerative, or disabling and that requires medical care or treatment  
34 over a prolonged period of time.

35 c. Pregnancy from the start of the second trimester.

36 d. A terminal illness for which an individual has a medical prognosis of  
37 a life expectancy of six months or less.

38 (2) Terminated or termination. – The expiration or nonrenewal of a contract. The  
39 term does not include an ending of the contract by an insurer for failure to  
40 meet applicable quality standards or for fraud.

41 (b) Termination of a Provider. – If (i) a contract between an insurer and a health care  
42 provider offering an exclusive provider benefit plan is terminated by the provider or by the  
43 insurer, or benefits or coverage provided by the insurer are terminated because of a change in the  
44 terms of provider participation in an insurer's exclusive provider benefit plan and (ii) an insured  
45 is undergoing treatment from the provider for an ongoing special condition on the date of  
46 termination, then the following shall apply:

47 (1) Upon termination of the contract by the insurer or upon receipt by the insurer  
48 of written notification of termination by the provider, the insurer shall notify  
49 the insured on a timely basis of the termination and of the insured's right to  
50 elect continuation of coverage of treatment by the provider. This subdivision  
51 shall apply only if the insured has a claim with the insurer for services

1 provided by the terminated provider or the insured is otherwise known by the  
2 insurer to be a patient of the terminated provider.

3 (2) Subject to subsection (h) of this section, the insurer shall permit an insured to  
4 elect to continue to be covered with respect to the treatment by the terminated  
5 provider for the ongoing special condition during a transitional period, as  
6 provided under this section.

7 (c) Newly Covered Insured. – Each exclusive provider benefit plan offered by an insurer  
8 shall provide transition coverage to individuals who (i) are newly covered under an exclusive  
9 provider benefit plan because the individual's employer has changed benefit plans and (ii) are  
10 undergoing treatment from a provider for an ongoing special condition. On the date of  
11 enrollment, an insurer shall notify the newly covered insured of (i) the right to elect continuation  
12 of coverage of treatment by a provider that is not contracted with the exclusive provider benefit  
13 plan and (ii) the method and time line by which the insured should contact the insurer. Subject  
14 to subsection (h) of this section, the insurer shall permit the newly covered insured to elect to  
15 continue to be covered with respect to the treatment by the provider of the ongoing special  
16 condition during a transitional period, as provided under this section.

17 (d) Transitional Period: In General. – Except as otherwise provided in this section, the  
18 length of a transitional period provided under this subsection shall be determined by the treating  
19 health care provider, so long as it does not exceed 90 days after the date of the notice to the  
20 individual described in subdivision (b)(1) of this section or the date of enrollment in a new plan  
21 described in subsection (c) of this section.

22 (e) Transitional Period: Scheduled Surgery, Organ Transplantation, or Inpatient Care. –  
23 If surgery, organ transplantation, or other inpatient care was scheduled for an individual, or if the  
24 individual was on an established waiting list for surgery, organ transplantation, or other inpatient  
25 care, before the date of the notice required under subdivision (b)(1) of this section or the date of  
26 enrollment described in subsection (c) of this section, then the transitional period under this  
27 subsection with respect to the surgery, transplantation, or other inpatient care shall extend  
28 through the date of discharge of the individual after completion of the surgery, transplantation,  
29 or other inpatient care, and through post discharge follow-up care related to the surgery,  
30 transplantation, or other inpatient care occurring within 90 days after the date of discharge.

31 (f) Transitional Period: Pregnancy. – If an individual has entered the second trimester of  
32 pregnancy on or before the date of the notice required under subdivision (b)(1) of this section or  
33 the date of enrollment in a new plan described in subsection (c) of this section, and the provider  
34 was treating the pregnancy before the date of the notice or the date of enrollment in the plan, then  
35 the transitional period with respect to the provider's treatment of the pregnancy shall extend  
36 through the provision of 60 days of postpartum care.

37 (g) Transitional Period: Terminal Illness. – If an individual was determined to be  
38 terminally ill at the time of a provider's termination of participation under subsection (b) of this  
39 section or at the time of enrollment in the plan under subsection (c) of this section, and the  
40 provider was treating the terminal illness before the date of the termination or enrollment in the  
41 plan, then the transitional period shall extend for the remainder of the individual's life with respect  
42 to care directly related to the treatment of the terminal illness or its medical manifestations.

43 (h) Permissible Terms and Conditions. – An insurer may condition coverage of continued  
44 treatment by a provider under subsection (b) or subsection (c) of this section upon the following  
45 terms and conditions:

46 (1) When care is provided pursuant to subsection (b) of this section, the provider  
47 agrees to accept reimbursement from the insurer and, with respect to  
48 cost-sharing, from the insured involved at the rates applicable before the start  
49 of the transitional period as payment in full.

50 (2) When care is provided pursuant to subsection (c) of this section, the provider  
51 agrees to accept the prevailing rate based on contracts the insurer has with the

1 same or similar providers in the same or similar geographic area or the PPO  
2 or other rate agreed to by the provider and insurer, if applicable, plus the  
3 applicable copayment from the newly covered insured, as reimbursement in  
4 full from the insurer and the insured for all covered services.

5 (3) The provider agrees to comply with the quality assurance programs of the  
6 insurer responsible for payment under this subsection and to provide to the  
7 insurer necessary medical information related to the care provided. The  
8 insurer's quality assurance programs shall not override the professional or  
9 ethical responsibility of the provider or interfere with the provider's ability to  
10 provide information or assistance to the insured.

11 (4) The provider agrees to adhere to the insurer's established policies and  
12 procedures for participating providers, including procedures regarding  
13 referrals and obtaining prior authorization, providing services pursuant to a  
14 treatment plan approved by the insurer, and member hold harmless provisions.

15 (5) The receipt of notification from the insured within 45 days of the date of the  
16 notice described in subdivision (b)(1) of this section or the new enrollment  
17 described in subsection (c) of this section that the insured elects to continue  
18 receiving treatment by the provider.

19 (6) The provider agrees to discontinue providing services at the end of the  
20 transition period and to assist the insured in an orderly transition to a network  
21 provider. Nothing in this section shall prohibit the insured from continuing to  
22 receive services from the provider at the insured's expense.

23 (i) Construction. – Nothing in this section shall be construed to do any of the following:

24 (1) Require the coverage of benefits that would not have been covered if the  
25 provider involved remained a participating provider or, in the case of a newly  
26 covered insured, require the coverage of benefits not provided under the  
27 policy in which the newly covered insured is enrolled.

28 (2) Require an insurer to offer a transitional period when the insurer terminates a  
29 provider's contract for reasons relating to quality of care or fraud. Refusal by  
30 an insurer to offer a transitional period under these circumstances is not  
31 subject to the grievance review provisions of G.S. 58-50-62.

32 (3) Prohibit an insurer from extending any transitional period beyond that  
33 specified in this section.

34 (4) Prohibit an insurer from terminating the continuing services of a provider  
35 when the insurer has determined that the provider's continued provision of  
36 services may result in, or is resulting in, a serious danger to the health or safety  
37 of the insured. A termination for these reasons shall be in accordance with the  
38 contract provisions that the provider would otherwise be subject to if the  
39 provider's contract were still in effect.

40 (j) Disclosure of Right to Transitional Period. – Each insurer shall include a clear  
41 description of an insured's rights under this section in its evidence of coverage and summary plan  
42 description."

43 **SECTION 2.** The Department of Insurance may adopt temporary rules to implement  
44 this act.

45 **SECTION 3.** This act becomes effective July 1, 2021, and applies to insurance  
46 contracts issued, renewed, or amended on or after that date.