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Continuing Health Benefits After Leaving County Employment

1. Q. I am no longer going to be working for the County. May I continue my health benefits?

A. Yes, however, your benefits depend on your age, the length of service with the County, your union, and when you started employment with the County. You may be eligible for:

COBRA
Federal Stimulus COBRA
Health Benefits Retirement for Employees Over Age 55
Continuation of Health Benefits as a Vestee
Health Benefits after you take your state pension

If you do not continue your health benefits in one of these ways, then your health coverage with Nassau County will end on the last day of the month following your separation from service (i.e. if your last day with the County is April 30th, your coverage ends May 31st).

2. Q. What happens if the County terminates my employment?

A. The rules that apply to continuation of health benefits are generally the same whether you leave County employment voluntarily or involuntarily. However, you are not eligible for Federal Stimulus COBRA if your employment is terminated for gross misconduct.

COBRA

3. Q: What is the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA)?

A. COBRA is a federal law which provides for the continuation of medical coverage in certain circumstances.

4. Q. Am I eligible for COBRA?

A. Everyone who leaves County employment is entitled to continue County health benefits through COBRA.

5. Q. Am I able to apply for COBRA coverage if I was fired for cause?

A. Yes, you may still apply for COBRA coverage even if you were fired for cause

6. Q. What is the deadline to apply for COBRA benefits?

A. You must apply no later than 60 days after your health benefits termination date, or within 60 days of the date you receive notification from your department Human Resource Officer informing you of your right to choose to continue your existing health benefits coverage.

7. Q. How long can I receive COBRA benefits?

A. Former employees can be covered for a maximum of eighteen months. Special rules extending coverage to 29 months may apply for disabled individuals and certain dependents.

8. Q. What does COBRA cost?

A. Under traditional COBRA, you pay the full cost of the health benefits plus an administrative fee. In 2009, traditional COBRA costs \$1,307.81 a month for NYSHIP family coverage and \$610.55 a month for NYSHIP individual coverage. The new federal stimulus package includes a subsidy for COBRA payments that will lower the cost for qualified former employees.

9. **Q. What happens to my COBRA health benefits after 18 months?**
- A. Under COBRA, after the eighteen months have passed the County will not continue your health benefits. You will be sent a conversion policy from the carriers to continue coverage, but the policy will not provide the same level of benefits.

Federal Stimulus COBRA

10. **Q. Do I qualify for the federal stimulus COBRA subsidy provided under the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (“ARRA”)?**
- A. The federal stimulus COBRA subsidy is available for anyone who loses their group health benefits due to an involuntary termination between September 1, 2008 and December 31, 2009 and makes less than \$150,000 for individuals or \$250,000 for couples in the year that they are receiving the subsidy.
11. **Q. What will I have to pay if I am eligible for the federal stimulus COBRA subsidy?**
- A. Qualified individuals receive a subsidy of 65% of the cost of COBRA for up to 9 months. With the federal stimulus COBRA subsidy in 2009, NYSHIP family coverage costs \$457.73 a month and NYSHIP individual coverage costs \$213.69 a month.
12. **Q. How long can I continue my health benefits under the federal stimulus COBRA subsidized price?**
- A. Nine months, under most circumstances.
13. **Q. What do I have to do to get the federal stimulus COBRA subsidy?**
- A. You will receive a notice of the federal stimulus COBRA subsidy from your department Human Resource Officer. You must complete the application and return it to the Comptroller’s Human Health Benefits Unit as soon as possible.

Health Benefits Retirement for Employees Over Age 55

14. Q. How do I continue health benefits if I am 55 or older when I leave County employment?

A. If you are at least age 55 at the time you leave County employment and have completed the required minimum number of years of County service (see question 16 below), you may be eligible to receive health benefits as if you had retired. This “retirement for health benefit purposes” can be done even though you have not retired in the State pension system and you plan to continue working.

15. Q. How much do I pay for health benefits when I retire for health benefit purposes?

A. Under current practice, the County will continue to pay for your health benefits at the contribution level in effect on the date you separated from service. For all union members and for ordinance employees hired before January 1, 2002, the County will continue to assume 100% of the cost of your NYSHIP health benefits. For ordinance employees hired on or after January 1, 2002, the County will continue to assume 90% of the cost of family health benefits and 95% of the cost of individual health benefits under the NYSHIP program. In 2009, ordinance health benefit retirees who contribute, are part of NYSHIP, and not eligible for Medicare will pay \$128.22 a month for family coverage and \$29.03 a month for individual coverage.

16. Q. What are the required minimum years of service for becoming a health benefits retiree?

A. You must have completed either 5 or 10 years of County service, depending on your union and your employment date.

- 10 Years: CSEA or IPBA hired on or after August 22, 2003
Ordinance hired on or after August 21, 2008
- 5 Years: PBA
SOA
DAI
ShOA
CSEA hired prior to August 22, 2003
Ordinance hired prior to August 21, 2008

17. Q. Does prior public service count for calculating the years of County service?

A. It depends on your union and your date of hire.

You need at least five years of employment by the State or a municipal subdivision, at least one year of which must be actual County employment if you are:

- CSEA hired prior to August 22, 2003
- Ordinance hired prior to August 21, 2008
- PBA
- SOA
- DAI
- ShOA

You need at least ten years of employment by the State or a municipal subdivision, at least five years of which must be actual County employment if you are:

- Ordinance hired on or after August 21, 2008

You need at least ten years of actual County employment and prior public service is not considered if you are:

- CSEA or IPBA hired on or after August 22, 2003

18. Q. Who determines whether I have prior public service?

A. Prior public service credit is calculated by your department's Human Resource Officer and approved by the Comptroller's Office. Please speak with your department Human Resource Officer to discuss whether you are entitled to prior public service credit and have not yet received it.

19. Q. How do I retire for health benefit purposes?

A. Contact your department Human Resource Officer for the necessary forms, which will be submitted to Comptroller's Health Benefits Unit.

Continuation of Health Benefits as a Vestee

- 20. Q. If I am under age 55, what other options do I have?**
- A.** For most employees, if you are under age 55 but have met the minimum years of employment with the County so that you could have become a health benefits retiree if you were 55, you are considered to have “vested” your health benefits. If you are considering becoming a health benefits vestee, please speak with your department Human Resource Officer to discuss your eligibility. If you are not eligible to become a vestee, you may continue your health benefits through COBRA. (See Questions 3 through 13.)
- 21. Q. What is the advantage to being a health benefits “vestee”?**
- A.** Under current County practice, if you separate from service with the County and continue your health benefits as a vestee, you will become a health benefits retiree when you reach age 55. This means that, under current practice, while you must pay the full cost of health benefits as a vestee, once you reach age 55, you will continue your health benefits only paying the level of contribution that you paid as an employee (see Question 15).
- 22. Q. How much will I pay to continue my health benefits as a vestee?**
- A.** As a vestee, you have to pay the full cost of the health benefits until you reach age 55 and become a health benefits retiree. In 2009, vestees paid \$1,282.17 a month for NYSHIP family coverage and \$598.58 a month for NYSHIP individual coverage. Vestees do not have to pay the administrative fee that is included in COBRA.
- 23. Q. Can I take advantage of the ARRA COBRA subsidy as a vestee?**
- A.** Yes. As a vestee, if you apply for and qualify for the ARRA COBRA subsidy, you may pay the ARRA subsidized price for health benefits (see Question 14) for up to nine months, and then return to paying the full charge for health benefits until you reach age 55 and become a health benefits retiree.

24. **Q. Is every County employee entitled to be a “vestee” if they have enough years of service when they leave County employment?**

A. No. Ordinance employees hired on or after August 21, 2008 can only continue health benefits as a vestee if they leave County employment at age 50 or older.

25. **Q. What will happen if I stop paying the premium?**

A: If you cease making the premium payments, your coverage will be canceled permanently and you will not be able to receive County-provided health benefits coverage when you reach retirement age.

Retiring through the State pension system

26. **Q. If I retire in the State pension system, do I automatically get retiree health benefits?**

A. Not necessarily. You will receive health benefits as a retiree if you have met the service requirements for vesting retiree benefits. For example, a CSEA retiree employed by the County on or after August 22, 2003 is eligible to retire after five years in the pension system but must have at least ten years of County employment to be eligible for retiree health benefits. Please check with your department’s Human Resource Officer to confirm your eligibility for retiree health benefits.

If you have any further questions please contact the Nassau County Comptroller’s Office Health Benefits Unit at ComptrollerHealthBenefits@nassaucountyny.gov or call at (516) 571-2369.