

***Insurance Times:*** Mass. Blue Cross offers high deductible PPO

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BOSTON — Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts plans to start offering a high-deductible health plan it says gives consumers more choices.

The plan, to be called Blue Care Elect, recently gained regulatory approval.

It's another PPO, or preferred provider organization plan, which will have employee deductibles ranging from \$1,000 to \$5,000.

Blue Cross officials say the plan will be 15 to 40 percent cheaper for employers than a standard typical HMO plan.

While employees would pay a higher deductible for services, some things in the plan aren't subject to deductibles — like preventative care that's handled within a network, said Alan Rosenberg, vice president of marketing for Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts.

Blue Cross Blue Shield developed the plan, Rosenberg said, to give employers and employees more choice of coverage after years of double digit rate hikes.

"We've always had a full portfolio with various levels of cost sharing and this expands the range for our employers," Rosenberg said.

"It also ... expands our consumer choice portfolio and involves our members more in care decisions, working with doctors in deciding what care they need and where."

Other insurers including Harvard Pilgrim and Tufts plan to offer higher-deductible plans.

But the Blue Cross Blue Shield plan differs, Rosenberg said, because of its PPO structure and an added, optional health care spending account employers would fund. The account could be used to reimburse up to 50 percent of the plan deductible and any unused money would be rolled over into the next year.