

# Targeting Your Market Reach: Boomers' Health Needs

*Contributed by Karen Gustin, LLIF  
Ameritas Group*



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Baby boomers are independent, sophisticated, 78 million strong, and expected to live seven years longer than the previous generation. Although boomers see themselves as self-sufficient, in reality they will face a variety of health issues in the upcoming years.

Are you taking advantage of sales opportunities to recommend insurance benefits that assist employers in addressing the special health needs of baby boomers?

According to the National Institute on Aging, boomers' demand for health insurance coverage and medical services will significantly rise over the next 22 years. In 2006, 37 million Americans were 65 or older. By 2030, that number will nearly double to 71.5 million, or 20 percent of the population. The Institute projects that by 2030, eight out of 10 older Americans will be managing multiple health issues and chronic illnesses.

Boomers are not content to fade quietly into the sunset, however. As retirement is looming on the horizon – the first boomers will reach age 65 in 2011 – many are not interested in full-time retirement, but want some type of flexible work situation that allows them to continue professional and personal interests.

With boomers nearing retirement age, employers are facing a shrinking workforce and the potential loss of experienced workers. Offering attractive health benefits packages, including eye, hearing, and dental coverage, is an important component to attracting and retaining baby boomers.

## **CHANGING EYE HEALTH NEEDS**

As baby boomer workers age, reports of major eye health concerns will increase. The most prevalent causes of vision loss are eye injuries and diseases.

In a 2006 National Eye Institute Survey of Public Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices Related to Eye Health and Disease, 71 percent of adults stated that loss of their eyesight would rate as a 10 on a scale of 1 to 10, meaning that it would have the greatest impact on their day-to-day lives.

There are four primary eye diseases linked to vision loss or blindness: age-related macular degeneration (AMD), glaucoma, cataracts, and retinopathy. These diseases usually develop slowly and are known as silent stealers of health. According to the NEI, of the 130 million Americans aged 40 and older, more than 30 million suffer from eye diseases.

The costs associated with adult eye care issues in the U.S. are more than \$51 billion, according to research from Prevent Blindness America's 2007 Economic Impact of Vision Problems.

The good news is that many new cases are curable or preventable by detection through a comprehensive wellness exam and proper treatment. Eye care insurance is an important benefit to older workers since they are more likely to get their eyes tested regularly if their employers offer options for eye care examinations and services.

### **RECOGNIZING HEARING ISSUES**

The EAR Foundation reports that at least 50 percent of boomers surveyed have difficulty hearing. Of this group, 75 percent said they find themselves in situations where people are not speaking loudly enough or clearly enough, or where the TV volume is too low.

Most boomers are reluctant to admit that they have problems with hearing and avoid exploring medical diagnosis or treatment options. Many do not want to take time for an examination and diagnosis. They are also concerned that if they do have a problem, the only corrective option is a hearing aid, which would serve as a visible indication that they are getting older. However, in addition to hearing aids, today there are other hearing improvement devices, including infrared listening systems or personal amplifiers similar in style to PDAs or iPods that magnify sound close to the listener's ear.

Employers offer hearing benefits. Many employers are recognizing the importance of raising employee awareness about the potential of hearing loss and treatment options, especially for boomers. Some provide educational lunch-and-learn sessions; others offer hearing benefits and encourage employees to seek routine hearing examinations to establish a benchmark for their hearing or treatment of hearing loss.

### **FOCUSING ON ORAL BEAUTY AND HEALTH**

Boomers understand the importance of taking good care of their teeth. They recognize the value of preventive dental care and quality dental benefits.

Most boomers want to preserve the beauty of their smiles and are interested in a variety of procedures to assist them in maintaining good oral health, including regular checkups, teeth whitening, and oral cosmetic surgery. However, just as boomers will face vision and hearing health concerns as they age, many will experience oral health issues, such as cancer or gum and periodontal disease.

Dental benefits will continue to rank very high on boomers' priority lists.

### **CAPITALIZING ON A GROWING MARKET**

The changing healthcare needs of boomer employees provide producers with new opportunities to market important benefits to employers. The key for producers is to thoroughly understand boomers' preferences, expectations, and emerging healthcare challenges, as well as the valuable contributions these employees make to the success of the organization. This information will assist producers in working with employers and insurance carriers to design benefit solutions that best serve all workers, and

especially address the health needs of boomers.

*Karen M. Gustin, LLIF, is vice president-group marketing and managed care for Ameritas Group, a division of Ameritas Life Insurance Corp. (a UNIFI Company), with headquarters in Lincoln, Nebraska. Ameritas is one of the nation's leading providers of dental and eye care products and services. Gustin's tenure with Ameritas Group spans 24 years. She is involved with the National Association of Dental Plans (NADP), serving on the board and chairing the Statistical Task Force.*

*For assistance in understanding insurance plans and carrier choices, or comparing coverage options, contact the Ameritas Group marketing department at 800-776-9446.*