

GROUP HEALTH CONTINUATION COVERAGE UNDER COBRA ELECTION NOTICE AND APPLICATION

You are receiving this notice because the Group Insurance Commission (GIC) has been informed that your current GIC coverage is ending due either to; (1) end of employment, (2) reduction in hours of employment, (3) death of employee/retiree, (4) divorce or legal separation, or (5) loss of dependent child status. This notice contains important information about your right to temporarily continue your health care coverage in the Group Insurance Commission's (GIC's) health plan through a federal law known as the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1985 (COBRA), as well as other health coverage alternatives that may be available to you through the Health Insurance Marketplace. If you elect to continue your coverage, COBRA coverage will begin on the first day of the month immediately after your current GIC coverage ends.

You must complete the enclosed Election Form and return it to the GIC no later than 60 days after the date of this notice by sending it by mail to the Public Information Unit at the GIC at P.O. Box 556, Randolph, MA 02368. If you do not submit a completed election form by this deadline, you will lose your right to elect COBRA continuation coverage.

WHAT IS COBRA CONTINUATION COVERAGE?

COBRA is a federal law under which certain former employees, retirees, spouses, former spouses, and dependent children have the right to temporarily continue their existing group health coverage at group rates when group coverage otherwise would end due to certain life events, called 'Qualifying Events.' If you elect COBRA continuation coverage ("COBRA coverage"), you are entitled to the same coverage being provided under the GIC's plan to similarly situated employees or dependents. The GIC administers COBRA coverage.

This notice explains your COBRA rights and what you need to do to protect your right to receive it. If you have questions about COBRA coverage, contact the GIC's Public Information Unit at 617-727-2310 or write to the Unit at P.O. Box 556, Randolph, MA 02368. You may also contact the U.S. Department of Labor's Employee Benefits Security Administration's website at www.dol.gov/ebsa for more general information about COBRA.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR COBRA CONTINUATION COVERAGE?

Each individual entitled to COBRA (known as a "Qualified Beneficiary") has an *independent right* to elect the coverage, regardless of whether or not other eligible family members elect it. Qualified Beneficiaries may elect to continue their group coverage that otherwise would end due to the following life events:

If you are an employee of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts or municipality covered by the GIC's health benefits program, you have the right to choose COBRA coverage if:

- You lose your group health coverage because your hours of employment are reduced; or
- Your employment ends for reasons other than gross misconduct.

If you are the spouse of an employee covered by the GIC's health benefits program, you have the right to choose COBRA coverage for yourself if you lose GIC health coverage for any of the following reasons (known as "qualifying events")

- Your spouse dies;
- Your spouse's employment with the Commonwealth or participating municipality ends for any reason other than gross misconduct or his/her hours of employment are reduced; or
- You and your spouse legally separate or divorce.

If you have dependent children who are covered by the GIC's health benefits program, each child has the right to elect COBRA coverage if he or she loses GIC health coverage for any of the following reasons (known as "qualifying events"):

- The employee-parent dies;
- The employee-parent's employment is terminated (for reasons other than gross misconduct) or the parent's hours or employment are reduced;
- The parents legally separate or divorce; or
- The dependent ceases to be a dependent child under GIC eligibility rules.

HOW LONG DOES COBRA CONTINUATION COVERAGE LAST?

By law, COBRA coverage must begin on the day immediately after your group health coverage otherwise would end. If your group coverage ends due to employment termination or reduction in employment hours, COBRA coverage may last for up to 18 months. If it ends due to any other qualifying events listed above, you may maintain COBRA coverage for up to 36 months.

If you have COBRA continuation coverage due to employment termination or reduction in hours, your family members' COBRA continuation coverage may be extended beyond the initial 18-month period up to a *total* of 36 months (as measured from the initial qualifying event) if a second qualifying event – the insured's death or divorce - occurs during the 18 months of COBRA coverage. **You must notify the GIC in writing within 60 days of the second qualifying event and before the 18-month COBRA period ends in order to extend the coverage.** Your COBRA coverage may be extended to a total of 29 months (as measured from the initial qualifying event) if any qualified beneficiary in your family receiving COBRA coverage is disabled during the first 60 days of your 18-month COBRA coverage. **You must provide the GIC with a copy of the Social Security Administration's disability determination within 60 days after you receive it and before your initial 18 month COBRA period ends in order to extend the coverage.** More information on [extending the length of COBRA continuation coverage](https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/EBSA/about-ebsa/our-activities/resource-center/publications/an-employees-guide-to-health-benefits-under-cobra.pdf) can be found here:

<https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/EBSA/about-ebsa/our-activities/resource-center/publications/an-employees-guide-to-health-benefits-under-cobra.pdf>

COBRA continuation coverage will end before the maximum coverage period ends if any of the following occurs:

- The COBRA cost is not paid **in full** when due (see section on paying for COBRA);
- You or another qualified beneficiary become covered under another group health plan that does not impose any pre-existing condition exclusion for the qualified beneficiary's pre-existing covered condition covered by COBRA benefits;
- You are no longer disabled as determined by the Social Security Administration (if your COBRA coverage was extended to 29 months due to disability);
- The Commonwealth of Massachusetts or your municipal employer no longer provides group health coverage to any of its employees; or
- Any reason for which the GIC terminates a non-COBRA enrollee's coverage (such as fraud).

The GIC will notify you in writing if your COBRA coverage is to be terminated before the maximum coverage period ends. The GIC reserves the right to terminate your COBRA coverage retroactively if you are subsequently found to have been ineligible for coverage.

HOW AND WHEN DO I ELECT COBRA CONTINUATION COVERAGE?

Qualified beneficiaries must elect COBRA coverage within 60 days of the date that their group coverage otherwise would end or within 60 days of receiving a COBRA notice, whichever is later. A qualified beneficiary may change a prior rejection of COBRA election any time until that date. **If you do not elect COBRA coverage within the 60-day election period, you will lose all rights to COBRA coverage.**

In considering whether to elect continuation coverage, you should take into account that you have special enrollment rights under federal law, including the right to request special enrollment in another group health plan for which you are otherwise eligible (such as a spouse's plan), even if the plan generally does not, accept late enrollees, if you request enrollment within 30 days after your GIC coverage ends. You will also have the same special enrollment right at the end of continuation coverage if you get continuation coverage for the maximum time available to you. **Your special enrollment period will end 60 days from the loss of GIC insurance coverage and you may be unable to enroll in other plans; therefore, you should take action right away.**

HOW MUCH DOES COBRA CONTINUATION COVERAGE COST?

Under COBRA, you must pay 102% of the applicable cost of your COBRA coverage. If your COBRA coverage is extended to 29 months due to disability, your cost will increase to 150% of the applicable full cost rate for the additional 11 months of coverage. COBRA costs will change periodically; current COBRA rates (102%) are included with this notice.

HOW AND WHEN DO I PAY FOR COBRA CONTINUATION COVERAGE?

If you elect COBRA coverage, you must make your first payment for COBRA coverage within 45 days after the date you elect it. **If you do not make your first payment for COBRA coverage within the 45-day period, you will lose all COBRA coverage rights under the plan. You may choose to submit the first payment with your application. If not, you will be billed.**

Your first payment must cover the cost of COBRA coverage from the time your coverage would have ended up to the time you make the first payment. **Services cannot be covered until the GIC receives and processes this first payment, and you are responsible for making sure that the amount of your first payment is enough to cover this entire period.** After you make your first payment, you will be required to pay for COBRA coverage for each subsequent month of coverage. These periodic payments are due usually around the 15th of each month. The GIC will send monthly bills, specifying the due date for payment and the address to which payment is to be sent for COBRA coverage, but **you are responsible for paying for the coverage even if you do not receive a monthly statement.** Payments should be sent to the GIC's address on the bill.

After the first payment, you will have a 30-day grace period beyond the due date on each monthly bill in which to make your monthly payment. Your COBRA coverage will be provided for each coverage period as long as payment for that coverage period is made before the end of the grace period for that payment. **If you fail to make a periodic payment before the end of the grace period for that payment, you will lose all rights to COBRA coverage.**

CAN I ELECT OTHER HEALTH COVERAGE BESIDES COBRA?

Yes. There may be other, more affordable coverage options for you and your family through Commonwealth's Health Connector Authority, through the Health Insurance Marketplace (outside of MA), Medicaid, Medicare, or other group health plan coverage options (e.g. a spouse's health plan). You also have the right to enroll, within 31 days after coverage ends, in an individual health insurance 'conversion' policy with your current health plan without providing proof of insurability. The GIC has no involvement in conversion programs. You pay the premium to the health plan for the coverage. The health coverage options listed in this section might not be identical to those provided through COBRA. Be aware that you may exercise these options in lieu of electing COBRA coverage or you may choose most of them after you have received the maximum COBRA coverage available to you, so long as they are requested within required timelines, discussed below. (All are available after COBRA except the 'conversion' policy option.) If you end COBRA coverage early or choose other coverage instead of COBRA, you cannot later switch to COBRA coverage.

In the Marketplace (see www.HealthCare.gov or call 1-800-318-2596) or Connector (<https://mahealthconnector.optum.com/individual/>), you may qualify for a tax credit that lowers your monthly premiums right away, and you can view your expected premium, deductibles, and out-of-pocket costs prior to making an enrollment decision. Also, you may be able to determine if you or your dependents qualify for MassHealth through the Connector's website and determine if you qualify for Medicaid or the [Children's Health Insurance Program \(CHIP\)](#) through the Marketplace. You have 60 days from the loss of coverage to enroll in either the Marketplace's or the Connector's coverage. After the 60 days, your special enrollment period ends and you will not be able to enroll, unless you have a separate qualifying life event or unless it is the Marketplace's or Connector's open enrollment period. Additionally, you should know that you will be able to enroll in a plan through the Marketplace or the Connector if requested within 60 days of your COBRA continuation coverage ending.

You may be eligible to enroll in coverage under another group health plan (like a spouse's plan), if you request enrollment within 30 days of the loss of coverage. If you or your dependent chooses to elect COBRA continuation coverage instead of enrolling in another group health plan, you may be able to enroll in that other group health plan within 30 days of your maximum length of COBRA continuation coverage ending.

You may want to think about the following when considering different options: What will each premium cost? What are the provider networks and is my doctor in network? What is on the drug formulary for each plan and will my medications be covered? What is the service area of each plan? What will my out-of-pocket cost-sharing obligations be (i.e. copayments, co-insurance, deductibles, etc.)?



CAN I ENROLL IN MEDICARE INSTEAD OF COBRA CONTINUATION COVERAGE AFTER MY GROUP HEALTH PLAN COVERAGE ENDS?

In general, if you don't enroll in Medicare Part A or B when you are first eligible because you are still employed, after the initial enrollment period for Medicare Part A or B, you have an 8-month special enrollment period¹ beginning on the earlier of:

- The month after your employment ends; or
- The month after group health plan coverage based on current employment ends.

If you don't enroll in Medicare Part B and elect COBRA continuation coverage instead, you may have to pay a Part B late enrollment penalty and you may have a gap in coverage if you decide you want Part B later. If you elect COBRA continuation coverage and then enroll in Medicare Part A or B before the COBRA continuation coverage ends, the Plan may terminate your continuation coverage. However, if Medicare Part A or B is effective on or before the date of the COBRA election, COBRA coverage may not be discontinued on account of Medicare entitlement, even if you enroll in the other part of Medicare after the date of the election of COBRA coverage.

If you are enrolled in both COBRA continuation coverage and Medicare. Medicare will generally pay first (primary payer) and COBRA will pay second. Certain COBRA continuation coverage plans may pay as if secondary to Medicare, even if you are not enrolled in Medicare.

For more information visit <https://www.medicare.gov/medicare-and-you>.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For more information about your rights under COBRA, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, and other laws affecting group health plans, visit the U.S. Department of Labor's Employee Benefits Security Administration (EBSA) website at <http://www.dol.gov/ebsa> or call their toll-free number at 1-866-444-3272.

¹ <https://www.medicare.gov/basics/get-started-with-medicare/sign-up/when-does-medicare-coverage-start>. These rules are different for people with End Stage Renal Disease (ESRD).



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Group Insurance Commission

YOUR COBRA CONTINUATION COVERAGE RESPONSIBILITIES

- **You must inform the GIC of any address changes to preserve your COBRA rights;**
- **You must elect COBRA within 60 days from the date you receive a COBRA notice or would lose group coverage due to one of the qualifying events described above.** If you do not elect COBRA coverage within the 60-day limit, your group health benefits coverage will end and you will lose all rights to COBRA coverage.
- **You must make the first payment for COBRA coverage within 45 days after you elect COBRA.** If you do not make your first payment for the entire COBRA cost due within that 45-day period, you will lose all COBRA coverage rights.
- **You must pay the subsequent monthly cost for COBRA coverage in full by the end of the 30-day grace period after the due date on the bill.** If you do not make payment in full by the end of the 30-day grace period after the due date on the bill, your COBRA coverage will end.
- **You must inform the GIC within 60 days of the later of either (1) the date of any of the following, or (2) the date on which coverage would be lost because of any of the following events:**
 - The employee's job terminates or his/her hours are reduced;
 - The insured dies;
 - The insured becomes legally separated or divorced;
 - The insured or insured's former spouse remarries;
 - A covered child ceases to be a dependent under GIC eligibility rules;
 - The Social Security Administration determines that the employee or a covered family member is disabled; or
 - The Social Security Administration determines that the employee or a covered family member is no longer disabled.

This notice does not fully describe COBRA or your GIC plan. More information is available in the plan handbook or from the GIC (plan's administrator).

If you do not inform the GIC of these events within the 60-day time period specified above, you will lose all rights to COBRA coverage. **To notify the GIC of any of the above events**, send a completed Enrollment/Change Form (mass.gov/gic-forms) or letter to the Public Information Unit at the Group Insurance Commission, P. O. Box 556, Randolph, MA 02368. For questions about this notice, please call the Public Information Unit at 617-727-2310.

Monthly Insurance Rates Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act (COBRA) Coverage Effective for the Premium due July 1, 2023

Full Cost COBRA Rates

Name of Health Plan	Individual Coverage	Family Coverage
Harvard Pilgrim Access America	1,200.41	2,673.60
UniCare Total Choice	1,371.29	3,033.75
UniCare PLUS	898.98	2,133.53
Harvard Pilgrim Explorer	992.97	2,453.75
Mass General Brigham Health Plan Complete	907.63	2,392.29
Harvard Pilgrim Quality	733.55	1,860.25
UniCare Community Choice	688.21	1,697.45
Health New England	747.46	1,787.40

You will be billed for your COBRA payments once you complete and return your application. Do not include payment with your application.



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Group Insurance Commission

GIC COBRA APPLICATION

Name of Applicant: _____

Preferred Email: _____

Home Address: _____

Preferred Phone: _____ Social Security Number: _____

Date of Coverage Termination (if known): _____

(Check one): I am the _____ Insured _____ Insured's Dependent (spouse, child)*

(If dependent) Name of Insured: _____

Insured's Social Security Number: _____

Applicant Signature: _____ Date: _____

*all dependents **must** complete information below in order to process application

IF YOU ARE A DEPENDENT APPLYING FOR COVERAGE, PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY

____ I am a former spouse of a state/municipal insured who

____ died on _____

____ remarried on _____

____ left state/municipal service on _____

____ I remarried on _____

____ I am a surviving spouse of a deceased state/municipal insured, and remarried on _____

____ I am a dependent of a state/municipal insured and

____ my parent (the state/municipal insured) died on _____

____ my parent (the state/municipal insured) left state/municipal service on _____ (if known)

____ my parents legally separated or became divorced on _____

____ I am age 19 to 26 and am not a dependent child as defined under federal healthcare reform

____ I am age 26 or over and am not a full-time student

____ I am a _____ spouse or _____ dependent of a state/municipal insured and the Social Security Administration determined that I am _____ disabled or _____ no longer disabled as of _____

Mail completed form to: GIC, P.O. Box 556, Randolph, MA 02368