

# HOP NEWS



## Take a Benefits Break

**Grab your favorite warm beverage, and learn how the Health Options Program makes benefits easy!**

Did you know that, every year, Medicare evaluates prescription drug plans and awards a star rating to each, based on performance? This star rating can be used to help you determine which plans excel, based on measured categories, including customer service, overall member satisfaction, and patient safety. Ratings range from 1 to 5 stars, with 5 being the highest score.

The Enhanced, Basic, and Value Medicare Rx Options under **the Health Options Program received a 4.5-star rating for 2024**, indicating that the program is highly rated in comparison to other prescription drug plans nationwide.

Continue reading to learn more about the prescription drug benefits and other plan news for the new year.

# Premium Assistance Lowers the Monthly Cost

PSERS members can enroll in the Health Options Program when they have a Qualifying Event, such as turning age 65. See the list of all Qualifying Events on page 4.

As a participant in the Health Options Program, you may be entitled to a special financial incentive that is not available with a commercial program such as AARP or Blue Cross Blue Shield. That special incentive is called **Premium Assistance**, and it can significantly lower your monthly premium. PSERS provides this help to eligible retirees to pay for health coverage through the Health Options Program or another Commonwealth public school employer or district health plan.

**How it works.** If you are eligible for Premium Assistance and enroll in either a Medicare Supplement plan or a Medicare Advantage plan through the Health Options Program, **PSERS will pay up to \$100 per month toward your monthly premium.** Over the course of your lifetime, on average, you could save up to \$24,000 as a participant in the Health Options Program.

Premium Assistance is added to your monthly retirement benefit as nontaxable income. If you are receiving Premium Assistance for coverage in your school employer plan and that coverage terminates, you must enroll in the Health Options Program to maintain your Premium Assistance.



For more information and eligibility rules, visit [HOPbenefits.com](https://www.hopbenefits.com) > **Getting Started > Premium Assistance**. Our newly redesigned website has lots of information for potential Health Options Program members! See page 4 for more information. You can also contact the HOP Administration Unit at 1-800-773-7725 with any questions.

# What's the Difference Between a Biosimilar and a Generic Medication?

If you watch any network television at all, you know from the commercials that new drugs are being introduced all the time to treat a variety of diseases.

Many of these new advertised drugs are considered biological drugs—complex medications made from living organisms to treat serious illnesses, such as cancer, autoimmune disorders, and complex conditions, that are usually injectable or given in an infusion center.

An exact copy cannot be produced from biologic drugs because they are generally made from living sources and require a specialized process to produce. Instead, a brand-name biologic drug can have a biosimilar—usually a lower-cost medication that is highly similar to the original (reference) medication.

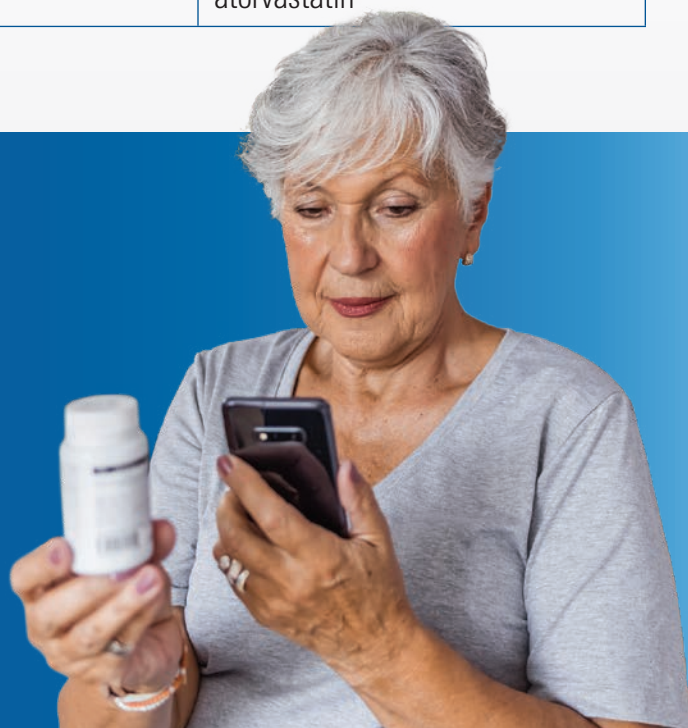
An FDA-approved biosimilar has no clinically meaningful difference in safety and effectiveness from the original biologic product. The approval process involves extensive analytical testing, preclinical studies, and clinical trials.

Biosimilars can be made by multiple companies, which may lower their cost—similar to generic drugs. Biosimilars are like generics in some ways but different in others, as shown in the table.

Biosimilars	Generics
Generally made from living sources	Generally made from chemicals
Require a specialized process to produce	Have a simpler process to copy
Very similar, but not identical, to original biologics	Copy of brand-name drugs
Usually less expensive than original biologics	Usually less expensive than brand-name drugs
<b>Example:</b> Biosimilar to Humira: Cyltezo and Yuflyma	<b>Example:</b> Generic for Lipitor is atorvastatin

*Biosimilar medications can offer access to important treatments and an opportunity to save money.*

**TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR.** *If you take a biologic medication for a serious condition, talk to your doctor about biosimilar medications that may be available to you. It could provide you with more choices and less cost.*



## Examples of Qualifying Events

- You retire or lose health care coverage under your school employer's health plan. Coverage under your school employer's health plan includes any COBRA continuation coverage you may elect under that school employer's plan.
- You involuntarily lose health care coverage under a non-school employer's health plan (which includes any COBRA continuation coverage you may elect under that non-school employer's health plan).
- There is a change in your family status (including divorce, the death of a spouse, addition of a dependent through birth, adoption, or marriage, or a dependent loses eligibility).
- You or your spouse reaches age 65 or becomes eligible for Medicare.
- You become eligible for Premium Assistance due to a change in legislation.
- A plan approved for Premium Assistance terminates, or you move out of a plan's service area.

Depending on individual circumstances, Qualifying Events may apply independently to you, your spouse, and/or your dependents. For example, if your spouse turns age 65 and becomes eligible for Medicare, he or she can choose to enroll in the Health Options Program, whether or not you also enroll.

## New Look for HOPbenefits.com

Our website is starting the year off with a brand-new look. We hope you enjoy it and find it easier to use. The next issue of **HOPNews** will take a more in-depth review of the website. In the meantime, visit **HOPbenefits.com** today.



# Why Join the Health Options Program?

**Age 65 discount.** If you enroll in the HOP Medical Plan within the three months before or the three months after the month in which you turn age 65, you get a premium discount starting at age 65. If you remain enrolled in the HOP Medical Plan, you'll receive a discount on your premium each year until your 70th birthday.

**Substantial premium subsidy.** If you are eligible for Premium Assistance and enroll in the Health Options Program, you can receive up to \$100 per month in Premium Assistance from PSERS to help pay for health care coverage.

**Designed with you in mind.** The Health Options Program is sponsored by the Pennsylvania Public School Employees' Retirement System (PSERS) for the exclusive benefit of our retirees and their families.

**Choice.** The program offers a choice of medical and prescription drug coverage options for both Medicare-eligible and non-Medicare-eligible participants. If you are Medicare-eligible, dental and vision coverage can be included with either the HOP Medical Plan or Value Medical Plan.

**Convenience.** We make paying monthly premiums easy by deducting them automatically from your retirement benefit (as long as your benefit exceeds the premium cost).

**Flexibility.** You can enroll, add dependents, or change your option at any time if you experience a Qualifying Event (see examples on the previous page). Once you are enrolled in the Health Options Program, you can also change your option each year during the Option Selection Period.

**SilverSneakers.** If you enroll in the HOP Medical Plan or the HOP Pre-65 Medical Plan, you can join the SilverSneakers® fitness program at no additional cost.

Customer service representatives can be reached by calling 1-800-773-7725 weekdays from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m ET.

Our website ([HOPbenefits.com](https://www.hopbenefits.com)) is accessible 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

## Spring 2024 Information Sessions

### Individual consultations

To schedule a 30-minute telephone appointment (not a group meeting), call the HOP Administration Unit at 1-800-773-7725, and let the representative know that you want to schedule an individual telephone consultation.

### Online webinars

Registration is not required but recommended. Go to the Information Sessions page on [HOPbenefits.com](https://www.hopbenefits.com) for the full schedule, webinar links, and webinar phone numbers. A preview of the schedule is listed below.

**Important:** The password "PSERS" is required to join the webinar.

Webinar schedule:

- March 19 at 10:00 a.m.
- March 21 at 1:00 p.m.
- March 27 at 9:00 a.m.
- April 9 at 1:00 p.m.
- April 18 at 11:00 a.m.



HEALTH OPTIONS PROGRAM



WWW.HOPBENEFITS.COM®

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Lancaster, PA 17608-1764

# Join us in 2024

## Have a Question?

If You Have a Question About	Please Call	Or Go Online
<b>Enrollment in the Health Options Program</b> <b>Health Options Program in general</b>	<b>HOP Administration Unit</b> <b>1-800-PSERS25 (1-800-773-7725)</b> TTY: <b>1-800-498-5428</b> From outside the U.S.: <b>+1 717-305-7388</b> 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. ET, weekdays	<b>HOPbenefits.com</b>
<b>Premium Assistance</b>	<b>Premium Assistance</b> <b>1-866-483-5509</b> 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. ET, weekdays	
<b>Retirement</b>	<b>PSERS</b> <b>1-888-PSERS4U (1-888-773-7748)</b> 7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. ET, weekdays	<b>psers.pa.gov</b>
<b>Medicare</b>	<b>Medicare</b> <b>1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227)</b>	<b>medicare.gov</b>