



July 12, 2024

IMPORTANT UPDATE REGARDING YOUR MEDICAL INSURANCE

Dear Niagara Falls Water Board Retiree:

In May 2024 the Niagara Falls Water Board advised retirees over age 65 that medical benefits would be provided supplemental to Medicare through Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield Plan Forever Blue 799 (PPO) effective July 1, 2024. As explained further below, to address concerns raised by some retirees, the Water Board will make continued participation in the Forever Blue 799 plan by retired employees who were part of the July 1, 2024, plan change optional. **If you take no action, you will be re-enrolled in the Highmark Blue Cross plan in which you were enrolled in June 2024 effective August 1, 2024.** Highmark will send you a new insurance card in the mail. If you wish to stay in the Forever Blue 799 plan – and to receive the additional benefits discussed below – you must contact the Water Board upon receipt of this letter.

The Forever Blue 799 plan provides benefits comparable to the Highmark Blue Cross PPO 800 plan that most retirees previously were enrolled in, but with features tailored to older adults. The benefits and coverage far exceed what is available under many Medicare Advantage plans. These enhancements increase the cost to the Water Board for the plan, but it still is less expensive for the Water Board than a traditional plan because it is subsidized by the Federal government. The Water Board will share a portion of the premium savings with retirees who choose to remain enrolled. **If you choose to remain enrolled in the Forever Blue 799 plan, the Water Board will reimburse you and your spouse, if also enrolled in the Forever Blue 799 plan, for payment of your standard monthly Medicare Part B premiums (equal to \$174.70 in 2024).** Please contact the Water Board Human Resources Department at (716) 299-7733 or (716) 299-7775 to let us know that you would like to remain in the Forever Blue 799 plan and provide your name, (and spouse's name), address and phone number. The Medicare Part B Premiums will be reimbursed twice a year, January and July.

Compared to retirees' current Highmark Blue Cross PPO 800 plan, the Forever Blue 799 plan has a lower out-of-pocket limit, lower primary and specialist doctor co-payments, lower prescription drug co-payments, and eliminates co-payments for emergency room and urgent care visits as well as for chemotherapy drugs and radiation treatments. It also offers an expanded, nationwide network allowing members to live anywhere in the United States plus supplemental benefits including a \$500 annual allowance for acupuncture and massage, \$300 each for vision and dental – in addition to, not in place of, current vision and dental benefits – as well as coverage for hearing aids and a free fitness center membership.

We hope that empowering you to make a choice between the plans will alleviate any concerns you may have about your retiree medical coverage. Please know that it is and shall remain the Water Board's policy and intention to honor its contractual obligations to its retirees. We sincerely regret any concern or inconvenience that you may have experienced in connection with this matter.

Thank you once again for your years of service providing drinking water and wastewater treatment services to the City of Niagara Falls. Your career contributed to the health and wellbeing of our society and environment.

Regards,

David San Lorenzo

Director of Administrative Services

Frequently Asked Questions

1. I want to re-enroll in my old plan effective August 1, 2024. What if I have a medical appointment in early August and haven't received my new insurance card by then?
Please call the Water Board Human Resources office and a staff member will reach out to Highmark for assistance.
2. Why does the insurance card I recently received say BC/BS Plan 278? I thought the Medicare supplement plan was Forever Blue 799?
Plan 278 is Highmark's code for all of its Medicare Supplement PPO plans. Your specific plan is indicated in the upper right corner of the insurance card, Forever Blue 799 (PPO). This does not impact coverage.
3. If I choose to stay in the Forever Blue 799 (PPO) Plan, must I stay in that plan forever?
The Water Board understands that individual circumstances may change, and that insurance companies may choose or be required by government regulations to modify insurance plans. It will work with Highmark to permit eligible retirees to switch between the Forever Blue 799 plan and their current insurance plans during an annual enrollment period (January for Forever Blue 799 and June for the PPO 800 plan).
4. Are surviving spouses over age 65 going to be re-enrolled in their old plans?
No. Under the applicable contracts, active plan coverage for surviving spouses is discontinued at age 65 and enrollment in a Medicare Advantage plan is required.