

COUNTY OF SONOMA AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY REPORT			Clerk of the Board Use Only Meeting Date Held Until ___/___/___ ___/___/___	
			Agenda Item No: Agenda Item No: _____ _____	
Department: Human Resources			() 4/5 Vote Required	
Contact: Marcia Chadbourne	Phone: 565-2473	Board Date: 7/21/09	Deadline for Board Action: 7/21/09	
Agenda Short Title: CareCounsel – Healthcare Assistance Program				
Requested Board Action: Authorize the Director of Human Resources to execute an amendment to the agreement with Care Counsel for healthcare advocacy for all County of Sonoma employees, retirees and their eligible dependents, to extend the term of the agreement for the period August 1, 2009 to July 31, 2010.				
CURRENT FISCAL YEAR FINANCIAL IMPACT				
<u>Expenditures</u>		<u>Add'l Funds Requiring Board Approval</u>		
Estimated Cost	\$ 127,452	Contingencies (Fund Name:)	\$	
Amount Budgeted	\$ 128,205	Unanticipated Revenue (Source:)	\$	
Other Avail Approp (Explain below)	\$ _____	Other Transfer(s) (Source:)	\$	_____
Additional Requested:	\$ 0	Add'l Funds Requested:	\$	_____
Explanation (if required): Current fiscal year budget includes appropriations in County Health Plan (596106) and Benefits (596031) indexes.				
Prior Board Action(s): 7/22/08 – Authorized Director of Human Resources to enter into initial agreement with CareCounsel for the term 8/1/08 through 7/31/09.				
Alternatives – Results of Non-Approval: Do not provide health care advocacy services for employees and retirees. Direct employees and retirees to resolve matters directly with their health care provider or health plan.				

Background:

The recommended action is to extend authority to the Director of Human Resources to execute an amendment to the agreement with CareCounsel to extend the term of the agreement for an additional one year, effective August 1, 2009.

CareCounsel is a healthcare advocacy service providing employees, retirees, and their families with confidential benefits support and assistance, health plan issues resolution, and health claims troubleshooting. The County first contracted with CareCounsel in August 2008 to respond to an ever increasing demand from employees, retirees and their dependents for assistance in navigating the multitude of issues involving healthcare plans, provider issues, claims processing issues, etc. There are approximately 3,917 active and 2,520 retired employee participants enrolled in County-sponsored medical plans. Including covered dependents, there are over 10,000 participants who at any one time may contact Human Resources - Risk Management with a health plan issue.

CareCounsel provides specialized expertise as their professional staff hold masters level academic degrees or above, or are Registered Nurses, with extensive experience in handling health care issues for employers, their employees and retirees. Services include assistance with comparing health plan options and understanding managed care benefits, resolving claims and billing disputes, physician selection, addressing provider network and HMO issues, correcting plan eligibility disputes, addressing quality of care concerns, supporting participants with doctor/patient communications issues, and providing health care education and related resources. They also provide research and assistance in selecting quality care "Centers of Excellence" and identifying best treatment modalities for the particular medical issue.

CareCounsel also maintains a data base of all issues they address and alerts the County in the areas of health plan coverage inconsistencies, regional network accessibility, systemic eligibility errors, and persistent claims adjudication problems. An added benefit of utilizing the services of CareCounsel is the issue of confidentiality. Having a third party vendor assist employees and retirees is an added "firewall" that assures the protection of employee and retiree health related confidentiality and privacy.

Attachments:

On File With Clerk:

Current CareCounsel Services Agreement and proposed amendment to Services Agreement.

CLERK OF THE BOARD USE ONLY

Board Action (if other than "Requested")

Vote:

Background (continued):

CareCounsel is one of six service providers of this type in the nation, and the only California-based company. CareCounsel provides services to many public and private employees in California including the City of Palo Alto, County of Santa Barbara, San Joaquin County Retirement Association, City of Santa Barbara, San Diego City Employees' Retirement System, Target Specialty Products, Bristol-Myers Squibb Company, Cost Plus World Markets, San Joaquin County Employees' Retirement Association, California State Automobile Association, and Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP.

CareCounsel provides quarterly utilization reports and overall annualized utilization rate is 13% (based upon 11 months of data through 6/30/09). The utilization rate is based upon the number of cases divided by total eligible population. This rate compares extremely favorably with the 12% utilization rate for similar entities. This utilization is better than like entities in early years of program use and is expected to increase over time as County customers become more aware of the value of this resource. The reports also provide metrics which show categories of case type handled by CareCounsel as well as detailed information of case type per health plan. Over time these statistics will help the County respond to identified trends to address improvements to the medical plans for County employees and retirees. The utilization reports also include satisfaction survey data. Surveys are sent to every individual who utilizes these services and 32% of the surveys were returned. The high survey satisfaction ratings are in alignment with feedback County benefits staff has received from our customers regarding their experiences using CareCounsel.

Human Resources - Risk Management's experience with CareCounsel has been excellent. They assisted with the transition of these services by providing communication efforts and materials to increase awareness of this program. CareCounsel representatives have met twice with the Joint Labor Management Benefits Committee during the contract period to provide orientation and to solicit feedback regarding their services. Employee and retiree satisfaction with CareCounsel has been very positive, with Medicare retirees particularly pleased with liaison services with the Centers for Medicare Services. Renewal of the CareCounsel agreement was discussed at the June 18, 2009 JLMBC meeting and this report was also reviewed at the July 16, 2009 meeting.

Care Counsel is an employer paid health service and has agreed to maintain the rate of \$1.65 per participant per month (PPPM). Costs for the first year of services ending 7/31/09 covering both active employees and retirees is \$127,396. Estimated cost for the term 8/1/09 through 7/31/10 is \$127,452 based on our current census of 3,917 employees and 2,520 retirees and there are sufficient appropriations in the FY 2009/2010 budget.

Recommended Action:

Authorize the Director of Human Resources to execute an amendment to the agreement with CareCounsel for healthcare advocacy for all County of Sonoma employees, retirees and their eligible dependents, to extend the term of the agreement for the period August 1, 2009 to July 31, 2010.