

## **§ 1357. Definitions**

As used in this article:

(a) “Dependent” means the spouse or child of an eligible employee, subject to applicable terms of the health care plan contract covering the employee, and includes dependents of guaranteed association members if the association elects to include dependents under its health coverage at the same time it determines its membership composition pursuant to subdivision (o).

(b) “Eligible employee” means either of the following:

(1) Any permanent employee who is actively engaged on a full-time basis in the conduct of the business of the small employer with a normal workweek of at least 30 hours, at the small employer’s regular places of business, who has met any statutorily authorized applicable waiting period requirements. The term does not include sole proprietors or the spouses of those sole proprietors, partners of a partnership or the spouses of those partners, or employees who work on a part-time, temporary, or substitute basis. It includes any eligible employee, as defined in this paragraph, who obtains coverage through a guaranteed association. Employees of employers purchasing through a guaranteed association are eligible employees if they would otherwise meet the definition except for the number of persons employed by the employer. Permanent employees who work at least 20 hours but not more than 29 hours are eligible employees if all four of the following apply:

(A) They otherwise meet the definition of an eligible employee except for the number of hours worked.

(B) The employer offers the employees health coverage under a health benefit plan.

(C) All similarly situated individuals are offered coverage under the health benefit plan.

(D) The employee shall have worked at least 20 hours per normal workweek for at least 50 percent of the weeks in the previous calendar quarter. The health care service plan may request any necessary information to document the hours and time period in question, including, but not limited to, payroll records and employee wage and tax filings.

(2) Any member of a guaranteed association as defined in subdivision (o).

(c) “In force business” means an existing health benefit plan contract issued by the plan to a small employer.

(d) “Late enrollee” means an eligible employee or dependent who has declined enrollment in a health benefit plan offered by a small employer at the time of the initial enrollment period provided under the terms of the health benefit plan and who subsequently requests enrollment in a health benefit plan of that small employer, provided that the initial enrollment period shall be a period of at least 30 days. It also means any member of an association that is a guaranteed association as well as any other person eligible to purchase through the guaranteed association when that person has failed to purchase coverage during the initial enrollment period provided under the terms of the guaranteed association’s plan contract and who subsequently requests enrollment in the plan, provided that the initial enrollment period shall be a period of at least 30 days. However, an eligible employee, any other person eligible for coverage through a guaranteed association pursuant to subdivision (o), or an eligible dependent shall not be considered a late enrollee if any of the following is applicable:

(1) The individual meets all of the following requirements:

(A) He or she was covered under another employer health benefit plan, the Healthy Families Program, the Access for Infants and Mothers (AIM) Program, or the Medi-Cal program at the time the individual was eligible to enroll.

(B) He or she certified at the time of the initial enrollment that coverage under another employer health benefit plan, the Healthy Families Program, the AIM Program, or the Medi-Cal program was the reason for declining enrollment, provided that, if the individual was covered under another employer health plan, the individual was given the opportunity to make the certification required by this subdivision and was notified that failure to do so could result in later treatment as a late enrollee.

(C) He or she has lost or will lose coverage under another employer health benefit plan as a result of termination of employment of the individual or of a person through whom the individual was covered as a dependent, change in employment status of the individual or of a person through whom the individual was covered as a dependent, termination of the other plan’s coverage, cessation of an employer’s contribution toward an employee or dependent’s coverage, death of the person through whom the individual was covered as a dependent, legal separation, or divorce; or he or she has lost or will lose coverage under the Healthy Families Program, the AIM Program, or the Medi-Cal program.

(D) He or she requests enrollment within 30 days after termination of coverage or employer contribution toward coverage provided under

another employer health benefit plan, or requests enrollment within 60 days after termination of Medi-Cal program coverage, AIM Program coverage, or Healthy Families Program coverage.

(2) The employer offers multiple health benefit plans and the employee elects a different plan during an open enrollment period.

(3) A court has ordered that coverage be provided for a spouse or minor child under a covered employee's health benefit plan.

(4)(A) In the case of an eligible employee, as defined in paragraph (1) of subdivision (b), the plan cannot produce a written statement from the employer stating that the individual or the person through whom the individual was eligible to be covered as a dependent, prior to declining coverage, was provided with, and signed, acknowledgment of an explicit written notice in boldface type specifying that failure to elect coverage during the initial enrollment period permits the plan to impose, at the time of the individual's later decision to elect coverage, an exclusion from coverage for a period of 12 months as well as a six-month preexisting condition exclusion, unless the individual meets the criteria specified in paragraph (1), (2), or (3).

(B) In the case of an association member who did not purchase coverage through a guaranteed association, the plan cannot produce a written statement from the association stating that the association sent a written notice in boldface type to all potentially eligible association members at their last known address prior to the initial enrollment period informing members that failure to elect coverage during the initial enrollment period permits the plan to impose, at the time of the member's later decision to elect coverage, an exclusion from coverage for a period of 12 months as well as a six-month preexisting condition exclusion unless the member can demonstrate that he or she meets the requirements of subparagraphs (A), (C), and (D) of paragraph (1) or meets the requirements of paragraph (2) or (3).

(C) In the case of an employer or person who is not a member of an association, was eligible to purchase coverage through a guaranteed association, and did not do so, and would not be eligible to purchase guaranteed coverage unless purchased through a guaranteed association, the employer or person can demonstrate that he or she meets the requirements of subparagraphs (A), (C), and (D) of paragraph (1), or meets the requirements of paragraph (2) or (3), or that he or she recently had a change in status that would make him or her eligible and that application for enrollment was made within 30 days of the change.

(5) The individual is an employee or dependent who meets the criteria described in paragraph (1) and was under a COBRA continuation provision and the coverage under that provision has been exhausted. For purposes of this section, the definition of "COBRA" set forth in subdivision (e) of Section 1373.621 shall apply.

(6) The individual is a dependent of an enrolled eligible employee who has lost or will lose his or her coverage under the Healthy Families Program, the AIM Program, or the Medi-Cal program and requests enrollment within 60 days after termination of that coverage.

(7) The individual is an eligible employee who previously declined coverage under an employer health benefit plan and who has subsequently

acquired a dependent who would be eligible for coverage as a dependent of the employee through marriage, birth, adoption, or placement for adoption, and who enrolls for coverage under that employer health benefit plan on his or her behalf and on behalf of his or her dependent within 30 days following the date of marriage, birth, adoption, or placement for adoption, in which case the effective date of coverage shall be the first day of the month following the date the completed request for enrollment is received in the case of marriage, or the date of birth, or the date of adoption or placement for adoption, whichever applies. Notice of the special enrollment rights contained in this paragraph shall be provided by the employer to an employee at or before the time the employee is offered an opportunity to enroll in plan coverage.

(8) The individual is an eligible employee who has declined coverage for himself or herself or his or her dependents during a previous enrollment period because his or her dependents were covered by another employer health benefit plan at the time of the previous enrollment period. That individual may enroll himself or herself or his or her dependents for plan coverage during a special open enrollment opportunity if his or her dependents have lost or will lose coverage under that other employer health benefit plan. The special open enrollment opportunity shall be requested by the employee not more than 30 days after the date that the other health coverage is exhausted or terminated. Upon enrollment, coverage shall be effective not later than the first day of the first calendar month beginning after the date the request for enrollment is received. Notice of the special enrollment rights contained in this paragraph shall be provided by the employer to an employee at or before the time the employee is offered an opportunity to enroll in plan coverage.

(e) “New business” means a health care service plan contract issued to a small employer that is not the plan’s in force business.

(f) “Preexisting condition provision” means a contract provision that excludes coverage for charges or expenses incurred during a specified period following the employee’s effective date of coverage, as to a condition for which medical advice, diagnosis, care, or treatment was recommended or received during a specified period immediately preceding the effective date of coverage.

(g) “Creditable coverage” means:

(1) Any individual or group policy, contract, or program that is written or administered by a disability insurer, health care service plan, fraternal benefits society, self-insured employer plan, or any other entity, in this state or elsewhere, and that arranges or provides medical, hospital, and surgical coverage not designed to supplement other private or governmental plans. The term includes continuation or conversion coverage but does not include accident only, credit, coverage for onsite medical clinics, disability income, Medicare supplement, long-term care, dental, vision, coverage issued as a supplement to liability insurance, insurance arising out of a workers’ compensation or similar law, automobile medical payment insurance, or insurance under which benefits are payable with or without regard to fault and that is statutorily required to be contained in any liability insurance policy or equivalent self-insurance.

(2) The Medicare Program pursuant to Title XVIII of the federal Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. Sec. 1395 et seq.).

(3) The Medicaid program pursuant to Title XIX of the federal Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. Sec. 1396 et seq.).

(4) Any other publicly sponsored program, provided in this state or elsewhere, of medical, hospital, and surgical care.

(5) Chapter 55 (commencing with Section 1071) of Title 10 of the United States Code (Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Uniformed Services (CHAMPUS)).

(6) A medical care program of the Indian Health Service or of a tribal organization.

(7) A state health benefits risk pool.

(8) A health plan offered under Chapter 89 (commencing with Section 8901) of Title 5 of the United States Code (Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP)).

(9) A public health plan as defined in federal regulations authorized by Section 2701(c)(1)(I) of the federal Public Health Service Act, as amended by Public Law 104-191, the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996.

(10) A health benefit plan under Section 5(e) of the federal Peace Corps Act (22 U.S.C. Sec. 2504(e)).

(11) Any other creditable coverage as defined by subdivision (c) of Section 2701 of Title XXVII of the federal Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. Sec. 300gg-3(c)).

(h) "Rating period" means the period for which premium rates established by a plan are in effect and shall be no less than six months.

(i) "Risk adjusted employee risk rate" means the rate determined for an eligible employee of a small employer in a particular risk category after applying the risk adjustment factor.

(j) "Risk adjustment factor" means the percentage adjustment to be applied equally to each standard employee risk rate for a particular small employer, based upon any expected deviations from standard cost of services. The factor may not be more than 110 percent or less than 90 percent.

(k) "Risk category" means the following characteristics of an eligible employee: age, geographic region, and family composition of the employee, plus the health benefit plan selected by the small employer.

(1) No more than the following age categories may be used in determining premium rates:

Under 30

30-39

40-49

50-54

55-59

60-64

65 and over.

However, for the 65 years of age and over category, separate premium rates may be specified depending upon whether coverage under the plan contract will be primary or secondary to benefits provided by the Medicare Program pursuant to Title XVIII of the federal Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. Sec. 1395 et seq.).

(2) Small employer health care service plans shall base rates to small employers using no more than the following family size categories:

- (A) Single.
- (B) Married couple.
- (C) One adult and child or children.
- (D) Married couple and child or children.

(3)(A) In determining rates for small employers, a plan that operates statewide shall use no more than nine geographic regions in the state, have no region smaller than an area in which the first three digits of all its ZIP Codes are in common within a county, and divide no county into more than two regions. Plans shall be deemed to be operating statewide if their coverage area includes 90 percent or more of the state's population. Geographic regions established pursuant to this section shall, as a group, cover the entire state, and the area encompassed in a geographic region shall be separate and distinct from areas encompassed in other geographic regions. Geographic regions may be noncontiguous.

(B)(i) In determining rates for small employers, a plan that does not operate statewide shall use no more than the number of geographic regions in the state that is determined by the following formula: the population, as determined in the last federal census, of all counties that are included in their entirety in a plan's service area divided by the total population of the state, as determined in the last federal census, multiplied by nine. The resulting number shall be rounded to the nearest whole integer. No region may be smaller than an area in which the first three digits of all its ZIP Codes are in common within a county and no county may be divided into more than two regions. The area encompassed in a geographic region shall be separate and distinct from areas encompassed in other geographic regions. Geographic regions may be noncontiguous. A plan shall not have less than one geographic area.

(ii) If the formula in clause (i) results in a plan that operates in more than one county having only one geographic region, then the formula in clause (i) shall not apply and the plan may have two geographic regions, provided that no county is divided into more than one region.

This section does not require a plan to establish a new service area or to offer health coverage on a statewide basis, outside of the plan's existing service area.

(l) "Small employer" means either of the following:

(1) Any person, firm, proprietary or nonprofit corporation, partnership, public agency, or association that is actively engaged in business or service, that, on at least 50 percent of its working days during the preceding calendar quarter or preceding calendar year, employed at least two, but no more than 50, eligible employees, the majority of whom were employed within this state, that was not formed primarily for purposes of buying health care service plan contracts, and in which a bona fide employer-employee relationship exists. In determining whether to apply the calendar quarter or calendar year test, a health care service plan shall

use the test that ensures eligibility if only one test would establish eligibility. However, for purposes of subdivisions (a), (b), and (c) of Section 1357.03, the definition shall include employers with at least two eligible employees. In determining the number of eligible employees, companies that are affiliated companies and that are eligible to file a combined tax return for purposes of state taxation shall be considered one employer. Subsequent to the issuance of a health care service plan contract to a small employer pursuant to this article, and for the purpose of determining eligibility, the size of a small employer shall be determined annually. Except as otherwise specifically provided in this article, provisions of this article that apply to a small employer shall continue to apply until the plan contract anniversary following the date the employer no longer meets the requirements of this definition. It includes any small employer as defined in this paragraph who purchases coverage through a guaranteed association, any employer purchasing coverage for employees through a guaranteed association, and any small employer as defined in this paragraph who purchases coverage through any arrangement.

(2) Any guaranteed association, as defined in subdivision (n), that purchases health coverage for members of the association.

(m) "Standard employee risk rate" means the rate applicable to an eligible employee in a particular risk category in a small employer group.

(n) "Guaranteed association" means a nonprofit organization comprised of a group of individuals or employers who associate based solely on participation in a specified profession or industry, accepting for membership any individual or employer meeting its membership criteria, and that (1) includes one or more small employers as defined in paragraph (1) of subdivision (l), (2) does not condition membership directly or indirectly on the health or claims history of any person, (3) uses membership dues solely for and in consideration of the membership and membership benefits, except that the amount of the dues shall not depend on whether the member applies for or purchases insurance offered to the association, (4) is organized and maintained in good faith for purposes unrelated to insurance, (5) has been in active existence on January 1, 1992, and for at least five years prior to that date, (6) has included health insurance as a membership benefit for at least five years prior to January 1, 1992, (7) has a constitution and bylaws, or other analogous governing documents that provide for election of the governing board of the association by its members, (8) offers any plan contract that is purchased to all individual members and employer members in this state, (9) includes any member choosing to enroll in the plan contracts offered to the association provided that the member has agreed to make the required premium payments, and (10) covers at least 1,000 persons with the health care service plan with which it contracts. The requirement of 1,000 persons may be met if component chapters of a statewide association contracting separately with the same carrier cover at least 1,000 persons in the aggregate.

This subdivision applies regardless of whether a contract issued by a plan is with an association, or a trust formed for or sponsored by an association, to administer benefits for association members.

For purposes of this subdivision, an association formed by a merger of two or more associations after January 1, 1992, and otherwise meeting the

criteria of this subdivision shall be deemed to have been in active existence on January 1, 1992, if its predecessor organizations had been in active existence on January 1, 1992, and for at least five years prior to that date and otherwise met the criteria of this subdivision.

(o) “Members of a guaranteed association” means any individual or employer meeting the association’s membership criteria if that person is a member of the association and chooses to purchase health coverage through the association. At the association’s discretion, it also may include employees of association members, association staff, retired members, retired employees of members, and surviving spouses and dependents of deceased members. However, if an association chooses to include these persons as members of the guaranteed association, the association shall make that election in advance of purchasing a plan contract. Health care service plans may require an association to adhere to the membership composition it selects for up to 12 months.

(p) “Affiliation period” means a period that, under the terms of the health care service plan contract, is required to elapse before health care services under the contract become effective.

**HISTORY:**

Added Stats 1992 ch 1128 § 5 (AB 1672), operative July 1, 1993. Amended Stats 1993 ch 113 § 1 (AB 1742), effective July 12, 1993, ch 217 § 1 (AB 2059), effective July 26, 1993, ch 1146 § 1 (AB 28), effective October 10, 1993; Stats 1994 ch 146 § 97 (AB 3601); Stats 1995 ch 668 § 1 (AB 503); Stats 1996 ch 359 § 1 (AB 8), ch 360 § 1 (SB 371), ch 1062 § 16.5 (AB 1832);

Stats 1997 ch 336 § 1 (SB 578), effective August 21, 1997, ch 581 § 1 (SB 392); Stats 1998 ch 418 § 1 (SB 1790); Stats 1999 ch 434 § 1 (SB 737); Stats 2000 ch 389 § 1 (SB 195); Stats 2005 ch 542 § 2 (AB 1533), effective January 1, 2006; Stats 2009 ch 542 § 2 (AB 1541), effective January 1, 2010; Stats 2010 ch 328 § 114 (SB 1330), effective January 1, 2011; Stats 2018 ch 700 § 1 (SB 1375), effective January 1, 2019.