

Board set to require spouse wellness tests

By [Brian Fanney](#), Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, October 21, 2015

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The State and Public School Life and Health Insurance Board voted Tuesday to add a requirement for spouse wellness checks to a program that allows each employee to save \$900 a year on insurance costs. The board oversees life and health insurance for state and public school employees.

In order to achieve the savings under the ARBenefitsWell program, employees must now take a health assessment and submit to a wellness visit with a physician. Spouses covered under the plan only need to take the health assessment.

Under the new rule, which goes into effect next year, spouses also would need a wellness visit to achieve the discount.

Board members discussed adding further requirements, including biometric screening. That would involve a doctor measuring cholesterol, glucose, waist circumference, blood pressure and other health indicators.

However, board members were concerned about the number of eligible plan members who had not completed all of the requirements for 2016. About 71,000 plan members are eligible, but only 54,000 have met the requirements.

Employees who are not examined before Nov. 1 will not be eligible for the discount for the 2016 plan year.

Bob Alexander, director of the state Employee Benefit Division, said the discount was enacted to save the plan money.

"We call this a wellness program, but it never really started that way. Our intent was to get people to go to the doctor so they would have a doctor so if they did get sick they wouldn't run to the emergency room," he said. "There is some money [spent] by making everyone go to the doctor, but so far we have seen very good results in catching some things early."

Emergency room visits are typically far more expensive than doctor visits.

Joseph Thompson, a board member and director of the Arkansas Center for Health Improvement, made the motion to add the spousal requirement. He said he and John Kirtley, a board member and executive director of the state Board of Pharmacy, would look into what metrics could be used to conduct a biometric screening in the future.

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