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Wealth—Not Health—Driving HSA Balances

Healthy behaviors may lead to lower healthcare spending, but not necessarily larger health savings account (HSA) balances.

A report by the nonpartisan Employee Benefit Research Institute (EBRI) found that while account balances for HSAs and health reimbursement arrangements (HRAs) increase with household income, there was little difference in account balances of those who engaged in a variety of health-conscious behaviors, or who participated in a wellness program.

The 2012 EBRI/MGA Consumer Engagement in Health Care Survey (CEHCS) found while account balances increased regardless of income level, in 2012, the average account balance was \$1,246 among individuals with less than \$50,000 in household income; \$1,359 among individuals with \$50,000–\$99,999, and \$1,957 among those with \$100,000 or more.

The findings were mixed on health-conscious behaviors; individuals who smoke and those who exercise have more money in their accounts than those who do not smoke or exercise, but obese individuals were found to have less money in their account than the non-obese.

Account balances were also examined using two variables to measure an individual's engagement in health care; whether an individual used cost and quality information to choose a doctor, and whether an individual participated in a wellness program. With both variables, very small differences in account balances were found, though individuals who participated in a wellness program had a higher average account balance than those who did not.

So-called consumer-driven health plans, such as HSAs and HRAs, covered about 25 million people in 2012, representing about 15 percent of the privately insured market.

The full report is published in the January 2013 *EBRI Issue Brief* no. 382, "Health Savings Accounts and Health Reimbursement Arrangements: Assets, Account Balances, and Rollovers, 2006–2012," online at www.ebri.org

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