

Benefits News

Get to know your benefits

November 2023



FINISH THE YEAR FINANCIALLY STRONG

We're near the end of 2023. Here's valuable information to put more money in your pocket and finish the year financially strong.

- [Seven tips to improve your financial wellbeing in 2023](#)
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Seven tips to improve your financial wellbeing in 2023

Are you looking for ways to save a few bucks and maximize your financial wellbeing in 2023? Consider taking these year-end steps.

1

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF PREVENTIVE CARE AT NO COST TO YOU.

Have you had your annual physical, dental, and vision exams yet this year? If not, schedule a time with your providers before the year's end. Catch any potential issues early while they're easier and less expensive to address.



2

USE YOUR FLEXIBLE SPENDING ACCOUNT (FSA) FUNDS. If you contribute to an FSA, now's the time to use those funds you've been setting aside from your paycheck all year.

Review the list of eligible health care and/or dependent day care expenses.

You must incur expenses by December 31 of the current plan year. Unused funds will be forfeited! You'll have until March 15 of the following year to submit claims for reimbursement.

3

GET THE MOST FROM YOUR HEALTH CARE DOLLARS. Have you reached your medical plan **deductible** this year? If so, consider getting the procedures you need this year when it will cost you less out of pocket. If you wait until next year, you'll have to pay the deductible all over again.

Have you reached your **out-of-pocket maximum**? If so, in-network services are no cost to you for the rest of the year. In general, it's good to plan large procedures and surgeries early in the year, if possible. That way, if/once you reach your out-of-pocket maximum, you can have free services for the rest of the year. You could even get services that you might not typically use, as acupuncture.

4

CONTRIBUTE MORE TO YOUR RETIREMENT SAVINGS. It never hurts to contribute more to your retirement savings plan. Whether you have a plan through PERS, with an independent bank or broker, or both, it's a good time to contribute up to the 2023 annual maximums.

5

PLAN FOR YEAR-END GIVING. The end of the year is a popular time to give to your favorite causes. You can often deduct your donations on your tax return for 2023. Just plan carefully so your hard-earned dollars go to a reliable source. Check out [this article](#) for things to consider before you give.

6

CONSIDER APPLYING FOR STUDENT LOAN RELIEF. It's easier than ever to apply and receive the help you need. [Learn more](#)

7

GET YOUR ESTATE PAPERS IN ORDER. Sometimes the unthinkable happens. Do your loved ones a big favor by having your wishes in writing now. Make sure your beneficiary designations are up to date for your life insurance and retirement plans. If you haven't yet, create a will, living will, and power of attorney document. It might be easier than you expect.

Create estate planning documents at no cost to you!

Are you enrolled in PEBB's Optional Life Insurance (coverage in addition to your PEBB-paid coverage)? If so, you have access to estate planning assistance. The easy-to-use tools will walk you through the steps to create a:

- Will
 - Health care agent
 - And more.
 - Living will
 - Power of attorney
-



Make the most of charitable donations

Planning to give to a charity before the end of the year? Make sure your donations go to a good cause.



ONLY GIVE TO REGISTERED CHARITIES.

In order to solicit donations in Oregon, most charitable organizations must be registered with the Department of Justice. Before you give, check the [Oregon Department of Justice's database](#) to confirm that the charity is registered.



MAKE SURE YOUR GIFT IS TAX DEDUCTIBLE.

An organization must be considered “qualified” for donations to be tax-deductible. Visit [IRS.gov](#) to verify that a charity has tax-deductible status (also known as a 501(c)(3) status). Keep good records. Make sure the charity provides a receipt for your donation.



DONATE YOUR TIME.

Consider giving your time to a cause in your community. Many organizations need volunteers, as well as financial support.



RESEARCH BEFORE YOU DONATE.

Learn about the charity's mission and the programs or services it provides. Websites like charitynavigator.org, guidestar.org, and give.org are also great sources of information. Be sure to understand:

- How much the charity spends on administration
- The percentage of your donation that actually goes to the cause

Note: Oregon law disqualifies charities from certain tax benefits if they don't spend at least 30 percent of donations on their charitable mission.

The Oregon Department of Justice can help

Visit doj.state.or.us, call 971-673-1880, or email charitable.activities@doj.state.or.us to:

- Learn more about specific charities
- Ask for written materials about charitable giving
- File a complaint about a charity or fundraiser
- Search an online database of charities registered in Oregon
- Obtain copies of charities' financial reports



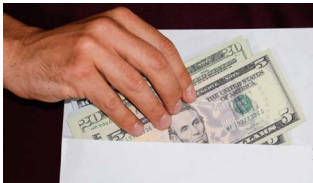
WATCH OUT FOR SCAMS.

Watch out for requests for money that look like an invoice. Be wary of mail from an organization you don't know. Be suspicious of statements that thank you for your previous support and ask you to give more. Fake charities often use names or logos that look like well-known organizations. They do this to confuse donors. Call the charity to confirm that they really exist and are aware of the campaign.



SAY “NO” TO PRESSURE.

Be suspicious of people who urge you to donate on the spot. Reputable charities will provide written materials and give you time to decide.



NEVER WIRE MONEY, BUY GIFT CARDS, OR GIVE CASH DONATIONS.

Contribute by check or credit card. Always make checks payable to the charity, not to the individual collecting your donation.



REDUCE THE NUMBER OF SOLICITATIONS YOU RECEIVE.

Include a note with your donation asking that the charity not rent or sell your name, or exchange it with anyone else. If you receive an unwanted phone call from a charity, file a complaint with the [Oregon Department of Justice](#).



REPORT FRAUD.

If you think you've been a victim of a charitable scam, call the Oregon Department of Justice at 971-673-1880 or visit [their website](#) to file a complaint online.

Source: Oregon Department of Justice



Are you missing some money?



You might have money waiting for you! Oregon's Unclaimed Property Program tracks unclaimed money and property, such as:

- Forgotten bank accounts
- Uncashed checks
- Insurance payments

Organizations generally make attempts to return money or property to the rightful owner. But sometimes they aren't successful. When that happens, they must report it to Oregon's Unclaimed Property Program. Once received, the statewide program holds onto the unclaimed money or property until it's claimed by the rightful owner.

Nationally, one in seven people have unclaimed property. Oregon's Unclaimed Property Program has helped return more than \$500 million to individuals.

It's easy to check if you have funds or property waiting for you. Just visit unclaimed.oregon.gov to search for and claim your unclaimed property. It only takes a few minutes.

Source: Oregon State Treasury

Save on food costs

It's no secret that food prices have increased. If you're wondering how to eat healthy food while not breaking the bank, you're not alone.

Use these tips to make easy and healthy meals on a budget.



Meal tips

- ✔ **Incorporate less expensive staples:** Fill up on less expensive, healthy foods such as dry beans and lentils, whole grains, pasta, seasonal produce, frozen veggies, oats, bananas, tinned fish, and peanut butter.
- ✔ **Eat less meat:** You can stretch a four-pound chicken into four meals. Instead of making meat the star of your plate, add it to vegetables in a curry, soup, or stew.
- ✔ **Use lentils/rice and beans/rice:** These provide protein and help you feel satisfied.
- ✔ **Eat seasonally:** Buy produce at your local farmers markets where it's usually less expensive and they might offer bulk deals.
- ✔ **Batch cook:** Did you find a good deal on discounted meat? Plan a large meal and freeze part of it. That way, you'll have dinner ready for a future busy night.



Shopping tips

- ✔ **Buy in bulk:** This is especially great for non-perishable foods, like canned goods.
- ✔ **Shop sales:** Stock up when there's a good sale on pasta, beans, or frozen veggies.
- ✔ **Clip coupons:** Pick up the habit and see how much you can save. Make it a contest in your home.
- ✔ **Look for discounts:** Most grocery stores have a small section in the produce area for less-than-perfect fruits and veggies. Take advantage of the mark downs and use them in breads, soups, or smoothies.
- ✔ **Make Thursdays a "clean out the pantry and refrigerator" night.** Use the food you already have on hand to create a meal and save on grocery costs.

For access to thousands of recipes, check out the WeightWatchers program. Anyone age 18 or older enrolled in an OEBC medical plan can sign up at no cost to you.

Source: WeightWatchers

Get help paying off your student loans

Got a federal student loan? You may have heard that payments restarted in October 2023. But did you know about the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) benefit? It's available to many Oregon state workers. And it's a lot easier to access than in previous years.



Who's eligible?

- Employees who work at least 30 hours a week for an Oregon state agency, public school, or other qualifying employer.



What's the benefit?

- If you qualify, you can have your remaining balance forgiven after 120 payments.



What types of federal student loans are included?

- Only Direct Loan Program loans that are not in default are eligible for PSLF. To confirm which type of loan you have, log into your Aid Summary on the [Federal Student Aid website](#).



What should you do before you apply?

- Log in to [studentaid.gov](#) to:
- Confirm your contact information
 - Review repayment options, and
 - Find out which lender services your loan



How do you apply?

- Visit [Public Service Loan Forgiveness \(PSLF\) Help Tool | Federal Student Aid](#) to apply or learn more. If you use the tool, you'll receive a form that you can send to your agency's employee services or human resources representative in your building.

For more information, visit [studentaid.gov](#) or the Oregon Division of Financial Regulation [Student loan help](#) page.

Source: Oregon Department of Consumer and Business Services

PEBB at your service

Ways the PEBB Board is already preparing for 2025 and beyond

At a recent Board retreat, the Board members began to brainstorm ideas to enhance the current medical plans. Here are the main ideas they discussed:



What's important to members

The Board talked about:

- What members expect and need from their benefits, such as:
 - How do members feel about benefit costs and vendor partner customer service?
 - How easy is it for members to find quality providers in their area or for certain specialties?
- Whether PEBB's plans are meeting the Board's objectives, such as:
 - Are members receiving quality care?
 - Are the vendor partners providing good customer service?
- If PEBB's plans are producing the end results the Board wants, such as:
 - How successful is the treatment our members have received?
 - Are the benefit partners accurately processing claims on time?
 - How can members make healthier decisions?



What future changes they might consider

The Board discussed the changes they might need or want to consider for future years based on:

- New health care laws
- Trends they're seeing in other state employer plans
- Member feedback

It's been a while since the Board has checked out other medical plan vendor partners. The current vendor partners have been performing well. But it might be helpful to see what others are offering. Do they have better programs? Better networks? Better ratings?

The Board plans to request bids from other potential vendor partners to see how they compare.

As you can see, the Board already has a lot to think about for the future. They'll spend the next several months working on these items to create medical plans that continue to meet the unique needs of PEBB members.



PEBB Board meetings are held on the third Tuesday of the month and are open to the public. To learn more about upcoming meetings or to view recordings of past meetings, visit the [Public Meetings](#) page of the PEBB website.

Benefits Questions?

Email: pebb.benefits@odhsoha.oregon.gov

Phone: 503-373-1102

