

§ 146.119

45 CFR Subtitle A (10–1–03 Edition)

§ 146.119 HMO affiliation period as alternative to preexisting condition exclusion.

(a) *General.* A group health plan offering health insurance coverage through an HMO, or an HMO that offers health insurance coverage in connection with a group health plan, may impose an affiliation period only if each of the requirements in paragraph (b) of this section is satisfied.

(b) *Requirements for affiliation period.*

(1) No preexisting condition exclusion is imposed with respect to any coverage offered by the HMO in connection with the particular group health plan.

(2) No premium is charged to a participant or beneficiary for the affiliation period.

(3) The affiliation period for the HMO coverage is applied uniformly without regard to any health status-related factors.

(4) The affiliation period does not exceed 2 months (or 3 months in the case of a late enrollee).

(5) The affiliation period begins on the enrollment date.

(6) The affiliation period for enrollment in the HMO under a plan runs concurrently with any waiting period.

(c) *Alternatives to affiliation period.* An HMO may use alternative methods in lieu of an affiliation period to address adverse selection, as approved by the State insurance commissioner or other official designated to regulate HMOs. Nothing in this section requires a State to receive proposals for or approve alternatives to affiliation periods.

§ 146.121 Prohibiting discrimination against participants and beneficiaries based on a health factor.

(a) *Health factors.* (1) The term *health factor* means, in relation to an individual, any of the following health status-related factors:

(i) Health status;

(ii) Medical condition (including both physical and mental illnesses), as defined in § 144.103;

(iii) Claims experience;

(iv) Receipt of health care;

(v) Medical history;

(vi) Genetic information, as defined in 45 CFR 144.103;

(vii) Evidence of insurability; or

(viii) Disability.

(2) Evidence of insurability includes—

(i) Conditions arising out of acts of domestic violence; and

(ii) Participation in activities such as motorcycling, snowmobiling, all-terrain vehicle riding, horseback riding, skiing, and other similar activities.

(3) The decision whether health coverage is elected for an individual (including the time chosen to enroll, such as under special enrollment or late enrollment) is not, itself, within the scope of any health factor. (However, under § 146.117, a plan or issuer must treat special enrollees the same as similarly situated individuals who are enrolled when first eligible.)

(b) *Prohibited discrimination in rules for eligibility—*(1) *In general—*(i) A group health plan, and a health insurance issuer offering health insurance coverage in connection with a group health plan, may not establish any rule for eligibility (including continued eligibility) of any individual to enroll for benefits under the terms of the plan or group health insurance coverage that discriminates based on any health factor that relates to that individual or a dependent of that individual. This rule is subject to the provisions of paragraph (b)(2) of this section (explaining how this rule applies to benefits), paragraph (b)(3) of this section (allowing plans to impose certain preexisting condition exclusions), paragraph (d) of this section (containing rules for establishing groups of similarly situated individuals), paragraph (e) of this section (relating to nonconfinement, actively-at-work, and other service requirements), paragraph (f) of this section (relating to bona fide wellness programs), and paragraph (g) of this section (permitting favorable treatment of individuals with adverse health factors).

(ii) For purposes of this section, rules for eligibility include, but are not limited to, rules relating to—

(A) Enrollment;

(B) The effective date of coverage;

(C) Waiting (or affiliation) periods;

(D) Late and special enrollment;

(E) Eligibility for benefit packages (including rules for individuals to

change their selection among benefit packages);

(F) Benefits (including rules relating to covered benefits, benefit restrictions, and cost-sharing mechanisms such as coinsurance, copayments, and deductibles), as described in paragraphs (b) (2) and (3) of this section;

(G) Continued eligibility; and

(H) Terminating coverage (including disenrollment) of any individual under the plan.

(iii) The rules of this paragraph (b)(1) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) *Facts.* An employer sponsors a group health plan that is available to all employees who enroll within the first 30 days of their employment. However, employees who do not enroll within the first 30 days cannot enroll later unless they pass a physical examination.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 1*, the requirement to pass a physical examination in order to enroll in the plan is a rule for eligibility that discriminates based on one or more health factors and thus violates this paragraph (b)(1).

Example 2. (i) *Facts.* Under an employer's group health plan, employees who enroll during the first 30 days of employment (and during special enrollment periods) may choose between two benefit packages: an indemnity option and an HMO option. However, employees who enroll during late enrollment are permitted to enroll only in the HMO option and only if they provide evidence of good health.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 2*, the requirement to provide evidence of good health in order to be eligible for late enrollment in the HMO option is a rule for eligibility that discriminates based on one or more health factors and thus violates this paragraph (b)(1). However, if the plan did not require evidence of good health but limited late enrollees to the HMO option, the plan's rules for eligibility would not discriminate based on any health factor, and thus would not violate this paragraph (b)(1), because the time an individual chooses to enroll is not, itself, within the scope of any health factor.

Example 3. (i) *Facts.* Under an employer's group health plan, all employees generally may enroll within the first 30 days of employment. However, individuals who participate in certain recreational activities, including motorcycling, are excluded from coverage.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 3*, excluding from the plan individuals who participate in recreational activities, such as motorcycling, is a rule for eligibility that

discriminates based on one more health factors and thus violates this paragraph (b)(1).

Example 4. (i) *Facts.* A group health plan applies for a group health policy offered by an issuer. As part of the application, the issuer receives health information about individuals to be covered under the plan. Individual *A* is an employee of the employer maintaining the plan. *A* and *A*'s dependents have a history of high health claims. Based on the information about *A* and *A*'s dependents, the issuer excludes *A* and *A*'s dependents from the group policy it offers to the employer.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 4*, the issuer's exclusion of *A* and *A*'s dependents from coverage is a rule for eligibility that discriminates based on one or more health factors, and thus violates this paragraph (b)(1). (If the employer is a small employer under 45 CFR 144.103 (generally, an employer with 50 or fewer employees), the issuer also may violate 45 CFR 146.150, which requires issuers to offer all the policies they sell in the small group market on a guaranteed available basis to all small employers and to accept every eligible individual in every small employer group.) If the plan provides coverage through this policy and does not provide equivalent coverage for *A* and *A*'s dependents through other means, the plan will also violate this paragraph (b)(1).

(2) *Application to benefits—(i) General rule.* (A) Under this section, a group health plan or group health insurance issuer is not required to provide coverage for any particular benefit to any group of similarly situated individuals.

(B) However, benefits provided under a plan or through group health insurance coverage must be uniformly available to all similarly situated individuals (as described in paragraph (d) of this section). Likewise, any restriction on a benefit or benefits must apply uniformly to all similarly situated individuals and must not be directed at individual participants or beneficiaries based on any health factor of the participants or beneficiaries (determined based on all the relevant facts and circumstances). Thus, for example, a plan or issuer may limit or exclude benefits in relation to a specific disease or condition, limit or exclude benefits for certain types of treatments or drugs, or limit or exclude benefits based on a determination of whether the benefits are experimental or not medically necessary, but only if the benefit limitation or exclusion applies uniformly to all similarly situated individuals and is

not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries based on any health factor of the participants or beneficiaries. In addition, a plan or issuer may impose annual, lifetime, or other limits on benefits and may require the satisfaction of a deductible, copayment, coinsurance, or other cost-sharing requirement in order to obtain a benefit if the limit or cost-sharing requirement applies uniformly to all similarly situated individuals and is not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries based on any health factor of the participants or beneficiaries. In the case of a cost-sharing requirement, see also paragraph (b)(2)(ii) of this section, which permits variances in the application of a cost-sharing mechanism made available under a bona fide wellness program. (Whether any plan provision or practice with respect to benefits complies with this paragraph (b)(2)(i) does not affect whether the provision or practice is permitted under any other provision of ERISA, the Americans with Disabilities Act, or any other law, whether State or federal.)

(C) For purposes of this paragraph (b)(2)(i), a plan amendment applicable to all individuals in one or more groups of similarly situated individuals under the plan and made effective no earlier than the first day of the first plan year after the amendment is adopted is not considered to be directed at any individual participants or beneficiaries.

(D) The rules of this paragraph (b)(2)(i) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) *Facts.* A group health plan applies a \$500,000 lifetime limit on all benefits to each participant or beneficiary covered under the plan. The limit is not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 1*, the limit does not violate this paragraph (b)(2)(i) because \$500,000 of benefits are available uniformly to each participant and beneficiary under the plan and because the limit is applied uniformly to all participants and beneficiaries and is not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries.

Example 2. (i) *Facts.* A group health plan has a \$2 million lifetime limit on all benefits (and no other lifetime limits) for participants covered under the plan. Participant *B* files a claim for the treatment of AIDS. At the next corporate board meeting of the plan sponsor, the claim is discussed. Shortly

thereafter, the plan is modified to impose a \$10,000 lifetime limit on benefits for the treatment of AIDS, effective before the beginning of the next plan year.

(ii) *Conclusion.* Under the facts of this *Example 2*, the plan violates this paragraph (b)(2)(i) because the plan modification is directed at *B* based on *B*'s claim.

Example 3. (i) A group health plan applies for a group health policy offered by an issuer. Individual *C* is covered under the plan and has an adverse health condition. As part of the application, the issuer receives health information about the individuals to be covered, including information about *C*'s adverse health condition. The policy form offered by the issuer generally provides benefits for the adverse health condition that *C* has, but in this case the issuer offers the plan a policy modified by a rider that excludes benefits for *C* for that condition. The exclusionary rider is made effective the first day of the next plan year.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 3*, the issuer violates this paragraph (b)(2)(i) because benefits for *C*'s condition are available to other individuals in the group of similarly situated individuals that includes *C* but are not available to *C*. Thus, the benefits are not uniformly available to all similarly situated individuals. Even though the exclusionary rider is made effective the first day of the next plan year, because the rider does not apply to all similarly situated individuals, the issuer violates this paragraph (b)(2)(i).

Example 4. (i) *Facts.* A group health plan has a \$2,000 lifetime limit for the treatment of temporomandibular joint syndrome (TMJ). The limit is applied uniformly to all similarly situated individuals and is not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 4*, the limit does not violate this paragraph (b)(2)(i) because \$2,000 of benefits for the treatment of TMJ are available uniformly to all similarly situated individuals and a plan may limit benefits covered in relation to a specific disease or condition if the limit applies uniformly to all similarly situated individuals and is not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries.

Example 5. (i) *Facts.* A group health plan applies a \$2 million lifetime limit on all benefits. However, the \$2 million lifetime limit is reduced to \$10,000 for any participant or beneficiary covered under the plan who has a congenital heart defect.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 5*, the lower lifetime limit for participants and beneficiaries with a congenital heart defect violates this paragraph (b)(2)(i) because benefits under the plan are not uniformly available to all similarly situated individuals and the plan's lifetime limit on benefits does not apply uniformly to all similarly situated individuals.

Example 6. (i) *Facts.* A group health plan limits benefits for prescription drugs to those listed on a drug formulary. The limit is applied uniformly to all similarly situated individuals and is not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 6*, the exclusion from coverage of drugs not listed on the drug formulary does not violate this paragraph (b)(2)(i) because benefits for prescription drugs listed on the formulary are uniformly available to all similarly situated individuals and because the exclusion of drugs not listed on the formulary applies uniformly to all similarly situated individuals and is not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries.

Example 7. (i) *Facts.* Under a group health plan, doctor visits are generally subject to a \$250 annual deductible and 20 percent coinsurance requirement. However, prenatal doctor visits are not subject to any deductible or coinsurance requirement. These rules are applied uniformly to all similarly situated individuals and are not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 7*, imposing different deductible and coinsurance requirements for prenatal doctor visits and other visits does not violate this paragraph (b)(2)(i) because a plan may establish different deductibles or coinsurance requirements for different services if the deductible or coinsurance requirement is applied uniformly to all similarly situated individuals and is not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries.

(ii) *Cost-sharing mechanisms and wellness programs.* A group health plan or group health insurance coverage with a cost-sharing mechanism (such as a deductible, copayment, or coinsurance) that requires a higher payment from an individual, based on a health factor of that individual or a dependent of that individual, than for a similarly situated individual under the plan (and thus does not apply uniformly to all similarly situated individuals) does not violate the requirements of this paragraph (b)(2) if the payment differential is based on whether an individual has complied with the requirements of a bona fide wellness program.

(iii) *Specific rule relating to source-of-injury exclusions.* (A) If a group health plan or group health insurance coverage generally provides benefits for a type of injury, the plan or issuer may not deny benefits otherwise provided for treatment of the injury if the injury results from an act of domestic violence or a medical condition (includ-

ing both physical and mental health conditions).

(B) The rules of this paragraph (b)(2)(iii) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) *Facts.* A group health plan generally provides medical/surgical benefits, including benefits for hospital stays, that are medically necessary. However, the plan excludes benefits for self-inflicted injuries or injuries sustained in connection with attempted suicide. Individual *D* suffers from depression and attempts suicide. As a result, *D* sustains injuries and is hospitalized for treatment of the injuries. Pursuant to the exclusion, the plan denies *D* benefits for treatment of the injuries.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 1*, the suicide attempt is the result of a medical condition (depression). Accordingly, the denial of benefits for the treatments of *D*'s injuries violates the requirements of this paragraph (b)(2)(iii) because the plan provision excludes benefits for treatment of an injury resulting from a medical condition.

Example 2. (i) *Facts.* A group health plan provides benefits for head injuries generally. The plan also has a general exclusion for any injury sustained while participating in any of a number of recreational activities, including bungee jumping. However, this exclusion does not apply to any injury that results from a medical condition (nor from domestic violence). Participant *E* sustains a head injury while bungee jumping. The injury did not result from a medical condition (nor from domestic violence). Accordingly, the plan denies benefits for *E*'s head injury.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 2*, the plan provision that denies benefits based on the source of an injury does not restrict benefits based on an act of domestic violence or any medical condition. Therefore, the provision is permissible under this paragraph (b)(2)(iii) and does not violate this section. (However, if the plan did not allow *E* to enroll in the plan (or applied different rules for eligibility to *E*) because *E* frequently participates in bungee jumping, the plan would violate paragraph (b)(1) of this section.)

(3) *Relationship to § 146.111.* (i) A pre-existing condition exclusion is permitted under this section if it—

(A) Complies with § 146.111;

(B) Applies uniformly to all similarly situated individuals (as described in paragraph (d) of this section); and

(C) Is not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries based on any health factor of the participants or

beneficiaries. For purposes of this paragraph (b)(3)(i)(C), a plan amendment relating to a preexisting condition exclusion applicable to all individuals in one or more groups of similarly situated individuals under the plan and made effective no earlier than the first day of the first plan year after the amendment is adopted is not considered to be directed at any individual participants or beneficiaries.

(ii) The rules of this paragraph (b)(3) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) *Facts.* A group health plan imposes a preexisting condition exclusion on all individuals enrolled in the plan. The exclusion applies to conditions for which medical advice, diagnosis, care, or treatment was recommended or received within the six-month period ending on an individual's enrollment date. In addition, the exclusion generally extends for 12 months after an individual's enrollment date, but this 12-month period is offset by the number of days of an individual's creditable coverage in accordance with § 146.111. There is nothing to indicate that the exclusion is directed at individual participants or beneficiaries.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 1*, even though the plan's preexisting condition exclusion discriminates against individuals based on one or more health factors, the preexisting condition exclusion does not violate this section because it applies uniformly to all similarly situated individuals, is not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries, and complies with § 146.111 (that is, the requirements relating to the six-month look-back period, the 12-month (or 18-month) maximum exclusion period, and the creditable coverage offset).

Example 2. (i) *Facts.* A group health plan excludes coverage for conditions with respect to which medical advice, diagnosis, care, or treatment was recommended or received within the six-month period ending on an individual's enrollment date. Under the plan, the preexisting condition exclusion generally extends for 12 months, offset by creditable coverage. However, if an individual has no claims in the first six months following enrollment, the remainder of the exclusion period is waived.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 2*, the plan's preexisting condition exclusions violate this section because they do not meet the requirements of this paragraph (b)(3); specifically, they do not apply uniformly to all similarly situated individuals. The plan provisions do not apply uniformly to all similarly situated individuals because individuals who have medical claims during the first six months following enrollment are not

treated the same as similarly situated individuals with no claims during that period. (Under paragraph (d) of this section, the groups cannot be treated as two separate groups of similarly situated individuals because the distinction is based on a health factor.)

(c) *Prohibited discrimination in premiums or contributions—(1) In general.* (i) A group health plan, and a health insurance issuer offering health insurance coverage in connection with a group health plan, may not require an individual, as a condition of enrollment or continued enrollment under the plan or group health insurance coverage, to pay a premium or contribution that is greater than the premium or contribution for a similarly situated individual (described in paragraph (d) of this section) enrolled in the plan or group health insurance coverage based on any health factor that relates to the individual or a dependent of the individual.

(ii) Discounts, rebates, payments in kind, and any other premium differential mechanisms are taken into account in determining an individual's premium or contribution rate. (For rules relating to cost-sharing mechanisms, see paragraph (b)(2) of this section (addressing benefits).)

(2) *Rules relating to premium rates—(i) Group rating based on health factors not restricted under this section.* Nothing in this section restricts the aggregate amount that an employer may be charged for coverage under a group health plan.

(ii) *List billing based on a health factor prohibited.* However, a group health insurance issuer, or a group health plan, may not quote or charge an employer (or an individual) a different premium for an individual in a group of similarly situated individuals based on a health factor. (But see paragraph (g) of this section permitting favorable treatment of individuals with adverse health factors.)

(iii) *Examples.* The rules of this paragraph (c)(2) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) *Facts.* An employer sponsors a group health plan and purchases coverage from a health insurance issuer. In order to determine the premium rate for the upcoming plan year, the issuer reviews the claims experience of individuals covered under the

plan. The issuer finds that Individual F had significantly higher claims experience than similarly situated individuals in the plan. The issuer quotes the plan a higher per-participant rate because of F's claims experience.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 1*, the issuer does not violate the provisions of this paragraph (c)(2) because the issuer blends the rate so that the employer is not quoted a higher rate for F than for a similarly situated individual based on F's claims experience.

Example 2. (i) *Facts.* Same facts as *Example 1*, except that the issuer quotes the employer a higher premium rate for F, because of F's claims experience, than for a similarly situated individual.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 2*, the issuer violates this paragraph (c)(2). Moreover, even if the plan purchased the policy based on the quote but did not require a higher participant contribution for F than for a similarly situated individual, the issuer would still violate this paragraph (c)(2) (but in such a case the plan would not violate this paragraph (c)(2)).

(3) *Exception for bona fide wellness programs.* Notwithstanding paragraphs (c)(1) and (2) of this section, a plan may establish a premium or contribution differential based on whether an individual has complied with the requirements of a bona fide wellness program.

(d) *Similarly situated individuals.* The requirements of this section apply only within a group of individuals who are treated as similarly situated individuals. A plan or issuer may treat participants as a group of similarly situated individuals separate from beneficiaries. In addition, participants may be treated as two or more distinct groups of similarly situated individuals and beneficiaries may be treated as two or more distinct groups of similarly situated individuals in accordance with the rules of this paragraph (d). Moreover, if individuals have a choice of two or more benefit packages, individuals choosing one benefit package may be treated as one or more groups of similarly situated individuals distinct from individuals choosing another benefit package.

(1) *Participants.* Subject to paragraph (d)(3) of this section, a plan or issuer may treat participants as two or more distinct groups of similarly situated individuals if the distinction between or among the groups of participants is based on a bona fide employment-based

classification consistent with the employer's usual business practice. Whether an employment-based classification is bona fide is determined on the basis of all the relevant facts and circumstances. Relevant facts and circumstances include whether the employer uses the classification for purposes independent of qualification for health coverage (for example, determining eligibility for other employee benefits or determining other terms of employment). Subject to paragraph (d)(3) of this section, examples of classifications that, based on all the relevant facts and circumstances, may be bona fide include full-time versus part-time status, different geographic location, membership in a collective bargaining unit, date of hire, length of service, current employee versus former employee status, and different occupations. However, a classification based on any health factor is not a bona fide employment-based classification, unless the requirements of paragraph (g) of this section are satisfied (permitting favorable treatment of individuals with adverse health factors).

(2) *Beneficiaries*—(i) Subject to paragraph (d)(3) of this section, a plan or issuer may treat beneficiaries as two or more distinct groups of similarly situated individuals if the distinction between or among the groups of beneficiaries is based on any of the following factors:

(A) A bona fide employment-based classification of the participant through whom the beneficiary is receiving coverage;

(B) Relationship to the participant (e.g., as a spouse or as a dependent child);

(C) Marital status;

(D) With respect to children of a participant, age or student status; or

(E) Any other factor if the factor is not a health factor.

(ii) Paragraph (d)(2)(i) of this section does not prevent more favorable treatment of individuals with adverse health factors in accordance with paragraph (g) of this section.

(3) *Discrimination directed at individuals.* Notwithstanding paragraphs (d)(1) and (2) of this section, if the creation or modification of an employment or coverage classification is directed at

individual participants or beneficiaries based on any health factor of the participants or beneficiaries, the classification is not permitted under this paragraph (d), unless it is permitted under paragraph (g) of this section (permitting favorable treatment of individuals with adverse health factors). Thus, if an employer modified an employment-based classification to single out, based on a health factor, individual participants and beneficiaries and deny them health coverage, the new classification would not be permitted under this section.

(4) *Examples.* The rules of this paragraph (d) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) *Facts.* An employer sponsors a group health plan for full-time employees only. Under the plan (consistent with the employer's usual business practice), employees who normally work at least 30 hours per week are considered to be working full-time. Other employees are considered to be working part-time. There is no evidence to suggest that the classification is directed at individual participants or beneficiaries.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 1*, treating the full-time and part-time employees as two separate groups of similarly situated individuals is permitted under this paragraph (d) because the classification is bona fide and is not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries.

Example 2. (i) *Facts.* Under a group health plan, coverage is made available to employees, their spouses, and their dependent children. However, coverage is made available to a dependent child only if the dependent child is under age 19 (or under age 25 if the child is continuously enrolled full-time in an institution of higher learning (full-time students)). There is no evidence to suggest that these classifications are directed at individual participants or beneficiaries.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 2*, treating spouses and dependent children differently by imposing an age limitation on dependent children, but not on spouses, is permitted under this paragraph (d). Specifically, the distinction between spouses and dependent children is permitted under paragraph (d)(2) of this section and is not prohibited under paragraph (d)(3) of this section because it is not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries. It is also permissible to treat dependent children who are under age 19 (or full-time students under age 25) as a group of similarly situated individuals separate from those who are age 25 or older (or age 19 or older if they are not full-time students) because the classification is permitted under paragraph (d)(2) of this section and is not di-

rected at individual participants or beneficiaries.

Example 3. (i) *Facts.* A university sponsors a group health plan that provides one health benefit package to faculty and another health benefit package to other staff. Faculty and staff are treated differently with respect to other employee benefits such as retirement benefits and leaves of absence. There is no evidence to suggest that the distinction is directed at individual participants or beneficiaries.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 3*, the classification is permitted under this paragraph (d) because there is a distinction based on a bona fide employment-based classification consistent with the employer's usual business practice and the distinction is not directed at individual participants and beneficiaries.

Example 4. (i) *Facts.* An employer sponsors a group health plan that is available to all current employees. Former employees may also be eligible, but only if they complete a specified number of years of service, are enrolled under the plan at the time of termination of employment, and are continuously enrolled from that date. There is no evidence to suggest that these distinctions are directed at individual participants or beneficiaries.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 4*, imposing additional eligibility requirements on former employees is permitted because a classification that distinguishes between current and former employees is a bona fide employment-based classification that is permitted under this paragraph (d), provided that it is not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries. In addition, it is permissible to distinguish between former employees who satisfy the service requirement and those who do not, provided that the distinction is not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries. (However, former employees who do not satisfy the eligibility criteria may, nonetheless, be eligible for continued coverage pursuant to a COBRA continuation provision or similar State law.)

Example 5. (i) *Facts.* An employer sponsors a group health plan that provides the same benefit package to all seven employees of the employer. Six of the seven employees have the same job title and responsibilities, but Employee *G* has a different job title and different responsibilities. After *G* files an expensive claim for benefits under the plan, coverage under the plan is modified so that employees with *G*'s job title receive a different benefit package that includes a lower lifetime dollar limit than in the benefit package made available to the other six employees.

(ii) *Conclusion.* Under the facts of this *Example 5*, changing the coverage classification for *G* based on the existing employment classification for *G* is not permitted under this

paragraph (d) because the creation of the new coverage classification for *G* is directed at *G* based on one or more health factors.

(e) *Nonconfinement and actively-at-work provisions*—(1) *Nonconfinement provisions*—(i) *General rule*. Under the rules of paragraphs (b) and (c) of this section, a plan or issuer may not establish a rule for eligibility (as described in paragraph (b)(1)(ii) of this section) or set any individual's premium or contribution rate based on whether an individual is confined to a hospital or other health care institution. In addition, under the rules of paragraphs (b) and (c) of this section, a plan or issuer may not establish a rule for eligibility or set any individual's premium or contribution rate based on an individual's ability to engage in normal life activities, except to the extent permitted under paragraphs (e)(2)(ii) and (3) of this section (permitting plans and issuers, under certain circumstances, to distinguish among employees based on the performance of services).

(ii) *Examples*. The rules of this paragraph (e)(1) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) Facts. Under a group health plan, coverage for employees and their dependents generally becomes effective on the first day of employment. However, coverage for a dependent who is confined to a hospital or other health care institution does not become effective until the confinement ends.

(ii) *Conclusion*. In this *Example 1*, the plan violates this paragraph (e)(1) because the plan delays the effective date of coverage for dependents based on confinement to a hospital or other health care institution.

Example 2. (i) Facts. In previous years, a group health plan has provided coverage through a group health insurance policy offered by Issuer *M*. However, for the current year, the plan provides coverage through a group health insurance policy offered by Issuer *N*. Under Issuer *N*'s policy, items and services provided in connection with the confinement of a dependent to a hospital or other health care institution are not covered if the confinement is covered under an extension of benefits clause from a previous health insurance issuer.

(ii) *Conclusion*. In this *Example 2*, Issuer *N* violates this paragraph (e)(1) because the group health insurance coverage restricts benefits (a rule for eligibility under paragraph (b)(1)) based on whether a dependent is confined to a hospital or other health care institution that is covered under an extension of benefits clause from a previous

issuer. This section does not affect any obligation Issuer *M* may have under applicable State law to provide any extension of benefits and does not affect any State law governing coordination of benefits.

(2) *Actively-at-work and continuous service provisions*—(i) *General rule*—(A) Under the rules of paragraphs (b) and (c) of this section and subject to the exception for the first day of work described in paragraph (e)(2)(ii) of this section, a plan or issuer may not establish a rule for eligibility (as described in paragraph (b)(1)(ii) of this section) or set any individual's premium or contribution rate based on whether an individual is actively at work (including whether an individual is continuously employed), unless absence from work due to any health factor (such as being absent from work on sick leave) is treated, for purposes of the plan or health insurance coverage, as being actively at work.

(B) The rules of this paragraph (e)(2)(i) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) Facts. Under a group health plan, an employee generally becomes eligible to enroll 30 days after the first day of employment. However, if the employee is not actively at work on the first day after the end of the 30-day period, then eligibility for enrollment is delayed until the first day the employee is actively at work.

(ii) *Conclusion*. In this *Example 1*, the plan violates this paragraph (e)(2) (and thus also violates paragraph (b) of this section). However, the plan would not violate paragraph (e)(2) or (b) of this section if, under the plan, an absence due to any health factor is considered being actively at work.

Example 2. (i) Facts. Under a group health plan, coverage for an employee becomes effective after 90 days of continuous service; that is, if an employee is absent from work (for any reason) before completing 90 days of service, the beginning of the 90-day period is measured from the day the employee returns to work (without any credit for service before the absence).

(ii) *Conclusion*. In this *Example 2*, the plan violates this paragraph (e)(2) (and thus also paragraph (b) of this section) because the 90-day continuous service requirement is a rule for eligibility based on whether an individual is actively at work. However, the plan would not violate this paragraph (e)(2) or paragraph (b) of this section if, under the plan, an absence due to any health factor is not considered an absence for purposes of measuring 90 days of continuous service.

(ii) *Exception for the first day of work*—(A) Notwithstanding the general rule in paragraph (e)(2)(i) of this section, a plan or issuer may establish a rule for eligibility that requires an individual to begin work for the employer sponsoring the plan (or, in the case of a multiemployer plan, to begin a job in covered employment) before coverage becomes effective, provided that such a rule for eligibility applies regardless of the reason for the absence.

(B) The rules of this paragraph (e)(2)(ii) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) *Facts.* Under the eligibility provision of a group health plan, coverage for new employees becomes effective on the first day that the employee reports to work. Individual *H* is scheduled to begin work on August 3. However, *H* is unable to begin work on that day because of illness. *H* begins working on August 4, and *H*'s coverage is effective on August 4.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 1*, the plan provision does not violate this section. However, if coverage for individuals who do not report to work on the first day they were scheduled to work for a reason unrelated to a health factor (such as vacation or bereavement) becomes effective on the first day they were scheduled to work, then the plan would violate this section.

Example 2. (i) *Facts.* Under a group health plan, coverage for new employees becomes effective on the first day of the month following the employee's first day of work, regardless of whether the employee is actively at work on the first day of the month. Individual *J* is scheduled to begin work on March 24. However, *J* is unable to begin work on March 24 because of illness. *J* begins working on April 7 and *J*'s coverage is effective May 1.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 2*, the plan provision does not violate this section. However, as in *Example 1*, if coverage for individuals absent from work for reasons unrelated to a health factor became effective despite their absence, then the plan would violate this section.

(3) *Relationship to plan provisions defining similarly situated individuals*—(i) Notwithstanding the rules of paragraphs (e)(1) and (2) of this section, a plan or issuer may establish rules for eligibility or set any individual's premium or contribution rate in accordance with the rules relating to similarly situated individuals in paragraph (d) of this section. Accordingly, a plan

or issuer may distinguish in rules for eligibility under the plan between full-time and part-time employees, between permanent and temporary or seasonal employees, between current and former employees, and between employees currently performing services and employees no longer performing services for the employer, subject to paragraph (d) of this section. However, other federal or State laws (including the COBRA continuation provisions and the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993) may require an employee or the employee's dependents to be offered coverage and set limits on the premium or contribution rate even though the employee is not performing services.

(ii) The rules of this paragraph (e)(3) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) *Facts.* Under a group health plan, employees are eligible for coverage if they perform services for the employer for 30 or more hours per week or if they are on paid leave (such as vacation, sick, or bereavement leave). Employees on unpaid leave are treated as a separate group of similarly situated individuals in accordance with the rules of paragraph (d) of this section.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 1*, the plan provisions do not violate this section. However, if the plan treated individuals performing services for the employer for 30 or more hours per week, individuals on vacation leave, and individuals on bereavement leave as a group of similarly situated individuals separate from individuals on sick leave, the plan would violate this paragraph (e) (and thus also would violate paragraph (b) of this section) because groups of similarly situated individuals cannot be established based on a health factor (including the taking of sick leave) under paragraph (d) of this section.

Example 2. (i) *Facts.* To be eligible for coverage under a bona fide collectively bargained group health plan in the current calendar quarter, the plan requires an individual to have worked 250 hours in covered employment during the three-month period that ends one month before the beginning of the current calendar quarter. The distinction between employees working at least 250 hours and those working less than 250 hours in the earlier three-month period is not directed at individual participants or beneficiaries based on any health factor of the participants or beneficiaries.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 2*, the plan provision does not violate this section because, under the rules for similarly situated individuals allowing full-time employees to

be treated differently than part-time employees, employees who work at least 250 hours in a three-month period can be treated differently than employees who fail to work 250 hours in that period. The result would be the same if the plan permitted individuals to apply excess hours from previous periods to satisfy the requirement for the current quarter.

Example 3. (i) *Facts.* Under a group health plan, coverage of an employee is terminated when the individual's employment is terminated, in accordance with the rules of paragraph (d) of this section. Employee *B* has been covered under the plan. *B* experiences a disabling illness that prevents *B* from working. *B* takes a leave of absence under the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993. At the end of such leave, *B* terminates employment and consequently loses coverage under the plan. (This termination of coverage is without regard to whatever rights the employee (or members of the employee's family) may have for COBRA continuation coverage.)

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 3*, the plan provision terminating *B*'s coverage upon *B*'s termination of employment does not violate this section.

Example 4. (i) *Facts.* Under a group health plan, coverage of an employee is terminated when the employee ceases to perform services for the employer sponsoring the plan, in accordance with the rules of paragraph (d) of this section. Employee *C* is laid off for three months. When the layoff begins, *C*'s coverage under the plan is terminated. (This termination of coverage is without regard to whatever rights the employee (or members of the employee's family) may have for COBRA continuation coverage.)

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 4*, the plan provision terminating *C*'s coverage upon the cessation of *C*'s performance of services does not violate this section.

(f) *Bona fide wellness programs.* [Reserved]

(g) *More favorable treatment of individuals with adverse health factors permitted—(1) In rules for eligibility.* (i) Nothing in this section prevents a group health plan or group health insurance issuer from establishing more favorable rules for eligibility (described in paragraph (b)(1) of this section) for individuals with an adverse health factor, such as disability, than for individuals without the adverse health factor. Moreover, nothing in this section prevents a plan or issuer from charging a higher premium or contribution with respect to individuals with an adverse health factor if they would not be eligible for the coverage were it not for the adverse health

factor. (However, other laws, including State insurance laws, may set or limit premium rates; these laws are not affected by this section.)

(ii) The rules of this paragraph (g)(1) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) *Facts.* An employer sponsors a group health plan that generally is available to employees, spouses of employees, and dependent children until age 23. However, dependent children who are disabled are eligible for coverage beyond age 23.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 1*, the plan provision allowing coverage for disabled dependent children beyond age 23 satisfies this paragraph (g)(1) (and thus does not violate this section).

Example 2. (i) *Facts.* An employer sponsors a group health plan, which is generally available to employees (and members of the employee's family) until the last day of the month in which the employee ceases to perform services for the employer. The plan generally charges employees \$50 per month for employee-only coverage and \$125 per month for family coverage. However, an employee who ceases to perform services for the employer by reason of disability may remain covered under the plan until the last day of the month that is 12 months after the month in which the employee ceased to perform services for the employer. During this extended period of coverage, the plan charges the employee \$100 per month for employee-only coverage and \$250 per month for family coverage. (This extended period of coverage is without regard to whatever rights the employee (or members of the employee's family) may have for COBRA continuation coverage.)

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 2*, the plan provision allowing extended coverage for disabled employees and their families satisfies this paragraph (g)(1) (and thus does not violate this section). In addition, the plan is permitted, under this paragraph (g)(1), to charge the disabled employees a higher premium during the extended period of coverage.

Example 3. (i) *Facts.* To comply with the requirements of a COBRA continuation provision, a group health plan generally makes COBRA continuation coverage available for a maximum period of 18 months in connection with a termination of employment but makes the coverage available for a maximum period of 29 months to certain disabled individuals and certain members of the disabled individual's family. Although the plan generally requires payment of 102 percent of the applicable premium for the first 18 months of COBRA continuation coverage, the plan requires payment of 150 percent of

the applicable premium for the disabled individual's COBRA continuation coverage during the disability extension if the disabled individual would not be entitled to COBRA continuation coverage but for the disability.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 3*, the plan provision allowing extended COBRA continuation coverage for disabled individuals satisfies this paragraph (g)(1) (and thus does not violate this section). In addition, the plan is permitted, under this paragraph (g)(1), to charge the disabled individuals a higher premium for the extended coverage if the individuals would not be eligible for COBRA continuation coverage were it not for the disability. (Similarly, if the plan provided an extended period of coverage for disabled individuals pursuant to State law or plan provision rather than pursuant to a COBRA continuation coverage provision, the plan could likewise charge the disabled individuals a higher premium for the extended coverage.)

(2) *In premiums or contributions—(i)* Nothing in this section prevents a group health plan or group health insurance issuer from charging individuals a premium or contribution that is less than the premium (or contribution) for similarly situated individuals if the lower charge is based on an adverse health factor, such as disability.

(ii) The rules of this paragraph (g)(2) are illustrated by the following example:

Example. (i) *Facts.* Under a group health plan, employees are generally required to pay \$50 per month for employee-only coverage and \$125 per month for family coverage under the plan. However, employees who are disabled receive coverage (whether employee-only or family coverage) under the plan free of charge.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example*, the plan provision waiving premium payment for disabled employees is permitted under this paragraph (g)(2) (and thus does not violate this section).

(h) *No effect on other laws.* Compliance with this section is not determinative of compliance with any other provision of the PHS Act (including the COBRA continuation provisions) or any other State or federal law, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act. Therefore, although the rules of this section would not prohibit a plan or issuer from treating one group of similarly situated individuals differently from another (such as providing different benefit packages to current and former employees), other federal or State laws may require that two separate groups

of similarly situated individuals be treated the same for certain purposes (such as making the same benefit package available to COBRA qualified beneficiaries as is made available to active employees). In addition, although this section generally does not impose new disclosure obligations on plans and issuers, this section does not affect any other laws, including those that require accurate disclosures and prohibit intentional misrepresentation.

(i) *Applicability dates—(1) Paragraphs applicable May 8, 2001.* Paragraphs (a)(1), (a)(2)(i), (b)(1)(i), (b)(1)(iii) *Example 1*, (b)(2)(i)(A), (b)(2)(ii), (c)(1)(i), (c)(2)(i), and (c)(3) of this section and this paragraph (j)(1) apply to group health plans and health insurance issuers offering group health insurance coverage May 8, 2001.

(2) *Paragraphs applicable for plan years beginning on or after July 1, 2001.* Except as provided in paragraph (j)(3) or (j)(4) of this section, the provisions of this section not listed in paragraph (j)(1) of this section apply to group health plans and health insurance issuers offering group health insurance coverage for plan years beginning on or after July 1, 2001. Except as provided in paragraph (j)(3) or (j)(4) of this section, with respect to efforts to comply with section 2702 of the PHS Act before the first plan year beginning on or after July 1, 2001, the Secretary will not take any enforcement action against an issuer or plan that has sought to comply in good faith with section 2702 of the PHS Act.

(3) *Transitional rules for individuals previously denied coverage based on a health factor.* This paragraph (j)(3) provides rules relating to individuals previously denied coverage under a group health plan or group health insurance coverage based on a health factor of the individual. Paragraph (j)(3)(i) clarifies what constitutes a denial of coverage under this paragraph (j)(3). Paragraph (j)(3)(ii) of this section applies with respect to any individual who was denied coverage if the denial was not based on a good faith interpretation of section 2702 of the PHS Act or the Secretary's published guidance. Under that paragraph, such an individual must be allowed to enroll retroactively to the effective date of section 2702 of

the PHS Act, or, if later, the date the individual meets eligibility criteria under the plan that do not discriminate based on any health factor. Paragraph (j)(3)(iii) of this section applies with respect to any individual who was denied coverage based on a good faith interpretation of section 2702 of the PHS Act or the Secretary's published guidance. Under that paragraph, such an individual must be given an opportunity to enroll effective July 1, 2001. In either event, whether under paragraph (j)(3)(ii) or (iii) of this section, the Secretary will not take any enforcement action with respect to denials of coverage addressed in this paragraph (j)(3) if the issuer or plan has complied with the transitional rules of this paragraph (j)(3).

(i) *Denial of coverage clarified.* For purposes of this paragraph (j)(3), an individual is considered to have been denied coverage if the individual—

(A) Failed to apply for coverage because it was reasonable to believe that an application for coverage would have been futile due to a plan provision that discriminated based on a health factor; or

(B) Was not offered an opportunity to enroll in the plan and the failure to give such an opportunity violates this section.

(ii) *Individuals denied coverage without a good faith interpretation of the law—*

(A) *Opportunity to enroll required.* If a plan or issuer has denied coverage to any individual based on a health factor and that denial was not based on a good faith interpretation of section 2702 of the PHS Act or any guidance published by the Secretary, the plan or issuer is required to give the individual an opportunity to enroll (including notice of an opportunity to enroll) that continues for at least 30 days. This opportunity must be presented not later than May 8, 2001.

(j) If this enrollment opportunity was presented before or within the first plan year beginning on or after July 1, 1997 (or in the case of a collectively bargained plan, before or within the first plan year beginning on the effective date for the plan described in section 102(c) (3) of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of

1996), the coverage must be effective within that first plan year.

(2) If this enrollment opportunity is presented after such plan year, the individual must be given the choice of having the coverage effective on either of the following two dates—

(j) The date the plan receives a request for enrollment in connection with the enrollment opportunity; or

(ii) Retroactively to the first day of the first plan year beginning on the effective date for the plan described in sections 102(c)(1) and (3) of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (or, if the individual otherwise first became eligible to enroll for coverage after that date, on the date the individual was otherwise eligible to enroll in the plan). If an individual elects retroactive coverage, the plan or issuer is required to provide the benefits it would have provided if the individual had been enrolled for coverage during that period (irrespective of any otherwise applicable plan provisions governing timing for the submission of claims). The plan or issuer may require the individual to pay whatever additional amount the individual would have been required to pay for the coverage (but the plan or issuer cannot charge interest on that amount).

(B) *Relation to preexisting condition rules.* For purposes of section 2701 of the PHS Act, the individual may not be treated as a late enrollee or as a special enrollee. Moreover, the individual's enrollment date is the effective date for the plan described in sections 102(c)(1) and (3) of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (or, if the individual otherwise first became eligible to enroll for coverage after that date, on the date the individual was otherwise eligible to enroll in the plan), even if the individual chooses under paragraph (j)(3)(ii)(A) of this section to have coverage effective only prospectively. In addition, any period between the individual's enrollment date and the effective date of coverage is treated as a waiting period.

(C) *Examples.* The rules of this paragraph (j)(3)(ii) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) *Facts.* Employer *X* maintains a group health plan with a plan year beginning October 1 and ending September 30. Individual *F* was hired by Employer *X* before the effective date of section 2702 of the PHS Act. Before the effective date of section 2702 of the PHS Act for this plan (October 1, 1997), the terms of the plan allowed employees and their dependents to enroll when the employee was first hired, and on each January 1 thereafter, but in either case, only if the individual could pass a physical examination. *F*'s application to enroll when first hired was denied because *F* had diabetes and could not pass a physical examination. Upon the effective date of section 2702 of the PHS Act for this plan (October 1, 1997), the plan is amended to delete the requirement to pass a physical examination. In November of 1997, the plan gives *F* an opportunity to enroll in the plan (including notice of the opportunity to enroll) without passing a physical examination, with coverage effective January 1, 1998.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 1*, the plan complies with the requirements of this paragraph (i)(3)(ii).

Example 2. (i) *Facts.* The plan year of a group health plan begins January 1 and ends December 31. Under the plan, a dependent who is unable to engage in normal life activities on the date coverage would otherwise become effective is not enrolled until the dependent is able to engage in normal life activities. Individual *G* is a dependent who is otherwise eligible for coverage, but is unable to engage in normal life activities. The plan has not allowed *G* to enroll for coverage.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 2*, beginning on the effective date of section 2702 of the PHS Act for the plan (January 1, 1998), the plan provision is not permitted under any good faith interpretation of section 2702 of the PHS Act or any guidance published by the Secretary. Therefore, the plan is required, not later than May 8, 2001, to give *G* an opportunity to enroll (including notice of the opportunity to enroll), with coverage effective, at *G*'s option, either retroactively from January 1, 1998 or prospectively from the date *G*'s request for enrollment is received by the plan. If *G* elects coverage to be effective beginning January 1, 1998, the plan can require *G* to pay any required employee premiums for the retroactive coverage.

(iii) *Individuals denied coverage based on a good faith interpretation of the law—(A) Opportunity to enroll required.* If a plan or issuer has denied coverage to any individual before the first day of the first plan year beginning on or after July 1, 2001 based in part on a health factor and that denial was based on a good faith interpretation of sec-

tion 2702 of the PHS Act or guidance published by the Secretary, the plan or issuer is required to give the individual an opportunity to enroll (including notice of an opportunity to enroll) that continues for at least 30 days, with coverage effective no later than July 1, 2001. Individuals required to be offered an opportunity to enroll include individuals previously offered enrollment without regard to a health factor but subsequently denied enrollment due to a health factor.

(B) *Relation to preexisting condition rules.* For purposes of section 2701 of the PHS Act, the individual may not be treated as a late enrollee or as a special enrollee. Moreover, the individual's enrollment date is the effective date for the plan described in sections 102(c)(1) and (3) of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (or, if the individual otherwise first became eligible to enroll for coverage after that date, on the date the individual was otherwise eligible to enroll in the plan). In addition, any period between the individual's enrollment date and the effective date of coverage is treated as a waiting period.

(C) *Example.* The rules of this paragraph (i)(3)(iii) are illustrated by the following example:

Example. (i) *Facts.* Individual *H* was hired by Employer *Y* on May 3, 1995. *Y* maintains a group health plan with a plan year beginning on February 1. Under the terms of the plan, employees and their dependents are allowed to enroll when the employee is first hired (without a requirement to pass a physical examination), and on each February 1 thereafter if the individual can pass a physical examination. *H* chose not to enroll for coverage when hired in May of 1995. On February 1, 1997, *H* tried to enroll for coverage under the plan. However, *H* was denied coverage for failure to pass a physical examination. Shortly thereafter, *Y*'s plan eliminated late enrollment, and *H* was not given another opportunity to enroll in the plan. There is no evidence to suggest that *Y*'s plan was acting in bad faith in denying coverage under the plan beginning on the effective date of section 2702 of the PHS Act (February 1, 1998).

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example*, because coverage previously had been made available with respect to *H* without regard to any health factor of *H* and because *Y*'s plan was acting in accordance with a good faith interpretation of section 2702 of the PHS Act (and guidance published by the Secretary), the

failure of *Y*'s plan to allow *H* to enroll effective February 1, 1998 was permissible on that date. However, under the transitional rules of this paragraph (i)(3)(iii), *Y*'s plan must give *H* an opportunity to enroll that continues for at least 30 days, with coverage effective no later than July 1, 2001. (In addition, February 1, 1998 is *H*'s enrollment date under the plan and the period between February 1, 1998 and July 1, 2001 is treated as a waiting period. Accordingly, any preexisting condition exclusion period permitted under § 146.111 will have expired before July 1, 2001.)

(4) *Special transitional rule for self-funded non-Federal governmental plans exempted under 45 CFR 146.180*—(i) If coverage has been denied to any individual because the sponsor of a self-funded non-Federal governmental plan has elected under § 146.180 to exempt the plan from the requirements of this section, and the plan sponsor subsequently chooses to bring the plan into compliance with the requirements of this section, the plan—

(A) Must notify the individual that the plan will be coming into compliance with the requirements of this section, specify the effective date of compliance, and inform the individual regarding any enrollment restrictions that may apply under the terms of the plan once the plan is in compliance with this section (as a matter of administrative convenience, the notice may be disseminated to all employees);

(B) Must give the individual an opportunity to enroll that continues for at least 30 days;

(C) Must permit coverage to be effective as of the first day of plan coverage for which an exemption election under § 146.180 (with regard to this section) is no longer in effect (or July 1, 2001, if later, and the plan was acting in accordance with a good faith interpretation of section 2702 of the PHS Act and guidance published by CMS); and

(D) May not treat the individual as a late enrollee or a special enrollee.

(ii) For purposes of this paragraph (i)(4), an individual is considered to have been denied coverage if the individual failed to apply for coverage because, given an exemption election under § 146.180, it was reasonable to believe that an application for coverage would have been denied based on a health factor.

(iii) The rules of this paragraph (i)(4) are illustrated by the following examples:

Example 1. (i) *Facts.* Individual *D* was hired by a non-Federal governmental employer in June 1996. The employer maintains a self-funded group health plan with a plan year beginning on October 1. Under the terms of the plan, employees and their dependents are allowed to enroll when the employee is first hired without regard to any health factor. If an individual declines to enroll when first eligible, the individual may enroll effective October 1 of any plan year if the individual can pass a physical examination. The plan sponsor elected under § 146.180 of this part to exempt the plan from the requirements of this section for the plan year beginning October 1, 1997, and renewed the exemption election for the plan year beginning October 1, 1998. That is, the plan sponsor elected to retain the evidence of good health requirement for late enrollees which, absent an exemption election under § 146.180 of this part, would have been in violation of this section as of October 1, 1997. *D* chose not to enroll for coverage when first hired. In February of 1998, *D* was treated for skin cancer but did not apply for coverage under the plan for the plan year beginning October 1, 1998, because *D* assumed *D* could not meet the evidence of good health requirement. With the plan year beginning October 1, 1999, the plan sponsor chose not to renew its exemption election and brought the plan into compliance with this section. However, the terms of the plan, effective October 1, 1999, were amended to permit enrollment only during the initial 30-day period of employment. The plan no longer permits late enrollment under any circumstances, including with respect to current employees not enrolled in the plan. Therefore, *D* was not given another opportunity to enroll in the plan. There is no evidence to suggest that the plan was acting in bad faith in denying *D* coverage under the plan beginning on the effective date of § 146.121 for the plan (October 1, 1999).

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 1*, because the plan under § 146.180 was previously excluded from the requirements of § 146.121 and thereafter was acting in accordance with a good faith interpretation of § 146.121 and guidance published by CMS, the failure of the plan to give *D* an opportunity to enroll effective October 1, 1999 was permissible on that date. However, under the transitional rules of this paragraph (i)(4), the plan must give *D* an opportunity to enroll that continues for at least 30 days, with coverage effective no later than July 1, 2001. (Additionally, October 1, 1999 is *D*'s enrollment date under the plan and the period between October 1, 1999 and July 1, 2001 is treated as a waiting period. Furthermore, if the plan sponsor has not elected to exempt the plan

§ 146.125

from limitations on preexisting condition exclusion periods, any preexisting condition exclusion period must be administered in accordance with § 146.111. Accordingly, any preexisting condition exclusion period permitted under § 146.111 will have expired before July 1, 2001.)

Example 2. (i) *Facts.* Individual *E* was hired by a non-Federal governmental employer in February 1995. The employer maintains a self-funded group health plan with a plan year beginning on September 1. Under the terms of the plan, employees and their dependents are allowed to enroll when the employee is first hired without regard to any health factor. If an individual declines to enroll when first eligible, the individual may enroll effective September 1 of any plan year if the individual can pass a physical examination. All enrollees are subject to a 12-month preexisting condition exclusion period. The plan sponsor elected under § 146.180 of this part to exempt the plan from the requirements of this section and § 146.111 (limitations on preexisting condition exclusion periods) for the plan year beginning September 1, 1997, and renews the exemption election for the plan years beginning September 1, 1998, September 1, 1999, and September 1, 2000. *E* chose not to enroll for coverage when first hired. In June of 2001, *E* is diagnosed as having multiple sclerosis (MS). With the plan year beginning September 1, 2001, the plan sponsor chooses to bring the plan into compliance with this section, but renews its exemption election with regard to limitations on preexisting condition exclusion periods. The plan affords *E* an opportunity to enroll, without a physical examination, effective September 1, 2001. *E* is subject to a 12-month preexisting condition exclusion period with respect to any treatment *E* receives that is related to *E*'s MS, without regard to any prior creditable coverage *E* may have. Beginning September 1, 2002, the plan will cover treatment of *E*'s MS.

(ii) *Conclusion.* In this *Example 2*, the plan complies with the requirements of this section. (The plan is not required to comply with the requirements of § 146.111 because the plan continues to be exempted from those requirements in accordance with the plan sponsor's election under § 146.180.)

[66 FR 1412, Jan. 8, 2001, as amended at 66 FR 14078, Mar. 9, 2001]

§ 146.125 Applicability dates.

(a) *General applicability dates—(1) Non-collectively bargained plans.* Part A of title XXVII of the PHS Act and §§ 146.101 through 146.119, § 146.143, § 146.145, 45 CFR part 150, and this section apply with respect to group health plans, and health insurance coverage offered in connection with group health

45 CFR Subtitle A (10–1–03 Edition)

plans, for plan years beginning after June 30, 1997, except as otherwise provided in this section.

(2) *Collectively-bargained plans.* Except as otherwise provided in this section (other than paragraph (a)(1) of this section), in the case of a group health plan maintained pursuant to one or more collective bargaining agreements between employee representatives and one or more employers ratified before August 21, 1996, Part A of Title XXVII of the PHS Act and §§ 146.101 through 146.119, § 146.143, § 146.145, 45 CFR part 150, and this section do not apply to plan years beginning before the later of July 1, 1997, or the date on which the last of the collective bargaining agreements relating to the plan terminates (determined without regard to any extension thereof agreed to after August 21, 1996). For these purposes, any plan amendment made under a collective bargaining agreement relating to the plan, that amends the plan solely to conform to any requirement of such part, is not treated as a termination of the collective bargaining agreement.

(3) *Preexisting condition exclusion periods for current employees.* (i) *General rule.* Any preexisting condition exclusion period permitted under § 146.111 is measured from the individual's enrollment date in the plan. This exclusion period, as limited under § 146.111, may be completed before the effective date of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) for his or her plan. Therefore, on the date the individual's plan becomes subject to part A of title XXVII of the PHS Act, no preexisting condition exclusion may be imposed with respect to an individual beyond the limitation in § 146.111. For an individual who has not completed the permitted exclusion period under HIPAA, upon the effective date for his or her plan, the individual may use creditable coverage that the person had as of the enrollment date to reduce the remaining preexisting condition exclusion period applicable to the individual.

(ii) *Examples.* The following examples illustrate the requirements of this paragraph (a)(3):

Example 1: (i) Individual *A* has been working for Employer *X* and has been covered under Employer *X*'s plan since March 1, 1997.