

Joint Benefits Committee

ANNUAL REPORT

CO-CHAIRS

RUMI GRAHAM & HEATHER TAKAHASHI

Joint Benefits Committee (JBC)

Annual Report- 2024

Background

The JBC was established as of December 1, 2022 through an [MOU](#) signed in November 2022. The MOU was based on the recommendations of the [Joint Academic Benefits Working Group](#), which met from May to September 2022 to investigate the feasibility and desirability of creating a committee of ULFA and Board representatives to oversee the benefits plans for academic staff.

This report of the Joint Benefits Committee (JBC) covers the period January 2024 through to December 2024. During this period, the JBC met a total of five times.

JBC Membership

The Terms of Reference of JBC provide that the committee comprises three ULFA representatives and three Board representatives. One membership change occurred in November 2024 when John Fehr replaced Asma Abbott in the role of support for the Board representatives.

Current JBC members:

Board members: Heather Takahashi (Associate VP, Human Resources), Helen Wolfe (Director, Payroll, Pension & Benefits), Nicole Eva (Associate University Librarian).
Support provided by John Fehr (Pension & Benefit Coordinator)

ULFA members: Rumi Graham (University Copyright Advisor & Graduate Studies Librarian), Paul Hayes (Professor, Chemistry & Biochemistry), Rick Mueller (Professor, Economics). Support provided by Aaron Chubb (Executive Director, ULFA)

JBC Mandate and Scope

As indicated in the [MOU](#), the mandate of the JBC is to engage in constructive dialogue on matters regarding benefits provided to academic staff, such as dental, vision, and mental health care; extended health coverage; life and disability insurance; and flexible spending accounts. The scope of JBC includes receiving costing and usage information and recommending benefits plan changes to ULFA and the Board for possible consideration in collective bargaining, but JBC does not participate in decision-making concerning benefits.

JBC Activities

1. Employee and Family Assistance Plan (EFAP) Review

In response to feedback received by Human Resources (HR) from faculty and staff suggesting some dissatisfaction with the current provider, Homewood Health, JBC undertook a review of the EFAP benefit. This benefit is available to all University staff, including all ULFA members. However, usage data by individual employee groups are unavailable because the service provider is not asked to track that information, for confidentiality and privacy reasons.

In July 2024, JBC members attended or watched recordings of information sessions presented by two different EFAP providers: GreenShield and CloudMD. Over September to December 2024, JBC worked on developing an EFAP survey that HR can administer to all employee groups, with promotion of the survey to ULFA members handled collaboratively by JBC. HR submitted the survey to the Survey Management Committee and it was approved. The survey was launched late in March 2025.

2. Adjustments in Plan Coverage and Contribution Rates (July 1)

The health and dental plan contribution rates are reviewed and updated each year as of July 1. The University's benefits consultant reviews the prior year's usage of the health and dental plan and makes recommendations on setting the contribution rates based on analysis of the prior year's usage, and cost trends. The JBC reviewed the usage rates for academic staff and received information about the new contribution rates in advance of them being communicated to academic staff. This will be an ongoing practice each year for the JBC to receive advance information on any changes to the contribution rates.

In response to feedback from academic staff, and other employees, the University reviewed the coverage for IUDs, that were previously not covered by the University's group benefits plan. In consultation with the JBC, IUD coverage was added effective July 1, 2025.

3. Group Benefits Usage & Costing Information, Plan Design, Benefits Philosophy

In 2024, the JBC requested detailed costings on some plan design changes to inform the discussion on recommendations that is outlined below. Furthering one of JBC's goals for 2024, HR also shared some information regarding the possibility of developing a benefits philosophy that would guide further plan design discussions and recommendations. The benefits philosophy will outline the goals of the benefits program, align with the University's values and consider the needs and preferences of employees.

4. Benefit Plan Design Recommendations

Over 2024, JBC explored and examined in further detail the various data received as part of the review of the ULFA benefits plan presented by Alberta Blue Cross in December 2023. This exploration and examination addressed four of JBC's seven goals for 2024:

- review outdated paramedical coverage model and mental health supports as key areas for possible enhancements;
- review dental plan design and vision care benefit;
- review feasibility of adding a managed drug formulary, generic pricing, and other drug management considerations as suggested by ABC to offset costs for other plan enhancements; and
- prepare recommendations to the parties at collective bargaining on possible adjustments to the current.

At its December meeting, JBC compiled a draft list of changes to the current ULFA benefit plan that could be put forward as recommended changes to ULFA and the Board for consideration by the parties in collective bargaining. This list included recommended changes to

- improve the drug plan and paramedical care, including mental health care;
- include coverage for glucose sensors (currently only glucose monitoring receivers and glucose monitoring transmitters are covered); and
- increase the maximum coverage for eye exam fees, which is currently limited to \$40 per exam.

JBC determined it would finalize a set of recommendations to forward to the bargaining parties for consideration in the current round of collective agreement negotiations.

JBC Goals for 2025

Topics identified by JBC for further discussion this year include the following:

- Consider future training and workshops on the benefits plans for current and new ULFA members (carried forward from 2024)
- Consider flexible benefits plans to meet an increasingly diverse group of members (carried forward from 2024)
- Continue to explore the possibility of a benefits philosophy to inform future plan design changes
- Assess the results of the EFAP survey and make provider recommendations
- Consider how JBC can play a meaningful role in considering possible changes in benefits providers
- Continue to look for fruitful ways to improve the benefits plan

Submitted by:
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April, 2025