

BUILDING TOMORROW,  
STARTING TODAY:

# Making the Most of Existing Benefits



The benefits package generously includes powerful savings and planning tools. These resources provide savings by deducting from gross earnings. Meaning, you may not even notice the amount deducted from your paycheck and deposited into your savings account.

A contribution to [deferred compensation](#) can grow quietly over time, giving you a stronger financial foundation for the future. If your plan allows pre-tax deferrals, you reduce taxable income now, while investing in tomorrow. This strategy aligns with professional financial-planning guidance for long-term security.

If you commute or use public transit, the [commuter benefit](#) provides great savings. option. Using pre-tax dollars for commuting or parking costs will save money and help reduce spending. Incorporating this benefit as a regular part of your budget, rather than an occasional perk, handsomely adds up yearly.



[Flexible Spending Accounts \(FSA\)](#) or similar pre-tax health/expense plans provide considerable savings. Use them to cover eligible expenses including medical, dental, prescriptions, vision and more, in lieu of and paying out of pocket with taxed income. If you are already enrolled, be sure to actively use your benefits. If you did not enroll during Open Enrollment, experiencing a Qualifying Life Event in 2026 may allow you to enroll at that time.

### Everyday Tips for Compound Saving

Smart saving doesn't require a lot of money to start. Small, consistent habits compound over time, making it feel easier to sustain.

► **Maximizing Rewards Credit Cards:**

If you consistently pay the credit card balance each month, a cash-back or rewards credit card can return a portion of your regular expenses (groceries, gas, utilities, even bills) back to you. That "found money" can be deposited straight into your savings or retirement plan.

**Continued on next page**



We've highlighted some resources you may want to look into further. Simply click or tap the icon or its hyperlink to access these select materials!



However, experts warn that rewards only make sense if you avoid interest and fees. Treating a credit card like a debit card, meaning you only spend what you already have, is a good rule of thumb. That way, the reward remains a bonus, versus a potentially dangerous trap.

- ▶ **Automatic Saving Transfers:** Before paying bills and recurring monthly expenses, designate a small amount of \$25 or \$50, for automatic transfer into a savings account, deferred compensation, or emergency fund. Do this immediately upon receiving bi-weekly checks. This “pay yourself first” approach simplifies saving and removes the temptation to spend before you save. Over time, it builds a habit that supports long-term stability. Starting early makes achieving long-term financial goals both manageable and sustainable.
- ▶ **Take advantage of employee and vendor discount programs:** Often, benefit plans or employer-affiliated programs offer savings not only on health or retirement, but also on everyday costs such as gym memberships, wellness services, travel or local discounts. Check what’s available through [Blue Access](#).

 **CLICK OR TAP!**

- ▶ **Review spending and renegotiate recurring costs:** Look at monthly subscriptions, service plans, insurance payments, and regularly occurring bills. Can anything be paused, downgraded, or renegotiated? Redirecting even a small amount can be applied toward monthly savings, reducing debt, an emergency fund, or a retirement account.
- ▶ **Let AI help you plan and save smarter:** Utilize AI to reduce the mental toll of budgeting and saving. Digital tools or budgeting apps, sometimes powered by AI, can help:
  - **Develop** short and long-term savings and retirement goals
  - **Analyze** spending against income and identify areas to reduce costs
  - **Plan** for upcoming expenses, track debt payoff, and monitor cash flow
  - **Generate** reminders for bill payments or benefit elections (like FSA or commuter plans)

With these tools, you don’t need to remember every detail. Simply review them periodically and adjust to reflect your lifestyle.

### Why Saving Now Matters



Establishing robust savings is a critical component of personal wellness. Having a financial buffer can reduce daily stress, making preventive care feel achievable, and preventing tough tradeoffs required when money is tight.

Long-term retirement savings mean more flexibility, less worry, and the freedom to make health-forward choices

as life changes. That peace of mind can also support better sleep, reduce stress, and increase mental wellness — all of which reinforce physical wellness.

### NOT SURE WHAT TO ASK CHATGPT? CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING PROMPTS:

- ▶ “Help me build a monthly budget and savings plan based on this income and these fixed expenses: [list details].”
- ▶ “Create a step-by-step plan to pay off my debts in a way that saves the most on interest. Here are my balances, interest rates, and minimum payments: [list details].”
- ▶ “Estimate how much I need to save each month to reach these goals by these dates: [emergency fund, travel, home, retirement].”
- ▶ “Review this last month of spending categories and suggest specific ways I can cut back without feeling deprived: [paste categories or ranges].”
- ▶ “Show me different ‘what if’ scenarios for my savings and retirement if I increase my contributions by 1%, 3%, or 5% starting this year.”

### Benefit Resources to Help You Save Smart

Use [BCBSIL benefits tools](#) for wellness planning and financial-friendly health coverage. Employees can make everyday health and commuting costs easier to manage with County benefits administered through [Optum Financial](#). From using a Health Care FSA for eligible medical, dental, vision, and prescription expenses, to paying for dependent care such as daycare, babysitting, nursery school, or senior day care, and covering transit or parking costs through Commuter Benefits, these programs are designed to support your well-being at work and beyond. Finally, consider exploring trusted outside financial-planning resources if needed (credit counselors, online financial education tools, etc.) to support long-term goals.



**SOURCE:** [US Department of Labor](#), [CNBC](#)