

Acupuncture • Chiropractic • Massage
Counseling • Naturopathic Medicine



CIRCLE HEALTHCARE CLINIC


(503) 230-0812

Brooke Winter, L.Ac.
Jan Corwin, DC
Kip M. Hard, DC
Valerie M. Lyon, MS, LMT
Suzanne Scopes, ND
Elizabeth Carlson, DC, LMT
Simone Koos-Gibbs, BS, LMT



316 NE 28th Street • Portland, Oregon 97232

Choosing the right mortgage is as important as choosing the right home!



CTX Mortgage Company

Lynn Defrees
Mortgage Loan Officer
Office (503) 245-8640
Residence (503) 697-8179
Pager (503) 299-0777

70% SOLD
and selling fast!!!

OWN YOUR OWN OWN LOFT CONDOMINIUM

MODELS ON DISPLAY

- Unique Lifestyle
- Attractive Price (\$80,000 to \$200,000)
- Frozen Property Tax (\$103 to \$240 per year for 10 yrs)
- Soaring 11 to 14 ft. ceilings
- Video Monitored Security

CHOICE LOFTS STILL AVAILABLE HURRY!!!

LOFTS (IRVING ST.)

223-1886
1314 NW Irving St.
Portland

local news

It's no big deal

After months or years in place, city and county benefits packages for same-sex domestic partners are drawing no complaints

by Inga Sorensen

It's been more than a year since medical benefits were extended to same-sex domestic partners of city of Portland employees. "And I'm happy to report that I have not received one complaint during that time," says Ruth Cusack, benefits manager for the City of Portland's Bureau of Risk Management. "When there was initial discussion about extending benefits, some people voiced their opposition, but since the benefits were approved it's been a non-issue."

As of Aug. 1, says Cusack, health coverage had been extended to the domestic partners of 119 city employees, 27 of whom are in same-sex partnerships. There are an estimated 5,000 city employees.

In June 1994, the Portland City Council extended health benefits to same-sex and unmarried heterosexual domestic partners when it approved labor agreements containing the provision with various unions; at the same time, the council adopted a resolution extending domestic partnership benefits to unrepresented city workers.

Opponents of the plan, including members of the Oregon Citizens Alliance, maintained the move was an assault on "traditional family values." Others expressed concern that extending benefits to unmarried partners would be an additional burden to taxpayers. But David Shaff, who works with the city's Personnel Bureau and Office of Finance and Accounting, says the estimated \$224,000 annual cost of extending the health benefits has been offset completely by reductions in other benefits, including an increase from \$5 to \$10 in the cost of a Kaiser office visit.

"I also want to point out that none of those receiving domestic partnership coverage is in my large-claim pool [employees whose health care costs are in excess of \$25,000 a year]," says Cusack. "Some people had said they were worried that partners living with AIDS might pose a financial burden, but that has not been a problem. To be honest, it's the folks who are being treated for cancer, diabetes or heart conditions that wind up in my large-claim pool."

To qualify for domestic partnership coverage, an employee must sign an affidavit stating that the employee and the domestic partner have shared a residence for at least one year and are responsible for each other's common welfare, including financial needs. Additionally, the partners must have a "close personal relationship" and cannot be related by blood. (Legally married couples, however, don't have to live under the same roof to receive coverage—a scenario, says Cusack, that is more common than you may realize.) Portland modeled its plan after that of the City of Seattle, which initiated domestic partnership coverage in 1991.

According to Shaff, most of the contracts make domestic partners eligible for medical, dental, vision and life insurance benefits. However, the Portland Police Association, which represents the bulk of the police force, has negotiated an agreement in which the word "spouse" and "domestic partners" are interchangeable.

"The word 'spouse' shows up three or four places in their contract. In this case, that also means domestic partners," says Shaff. "That means that those covered by the Portland Police Association's contract will receive a handful of spousal benefits that employees covered by other contracts do not

currently receive," he says.

Those benefits include up to five days paid leave to care for a sick family member, paid funeral/death leave, retiree and survivor benefits for the domestic partner, and up to \$5,000 paid funeral expenses if one's spouse is killed in the line of duty.

"It's a little ironic that the Portland Police Association has this, given that when you think of the police you think of all these macho guys who may be gay but would never let you know it," says Shaff. "It's kind of funny when you think about it."

Cusack says she has received only positive feedback from employees: "And quite frankly, from a recruitment perspective it's important we do this. We want to attract the best people we can."

She adds, "Mayor Katz has always addressed this as a health care issue—not a moral issue."



When employees come to me and say they'd like their partner to be put on the plan, it's because their partner doesn't have any health coverage. This is not about politics."

Another local government agency, Metro, has extended coverage to same-sex partners. Lisa Godwin, spokeswoman for Metro Executive Mike Burton, says "three or four" employees have applied for domestic partnership coverage for their same-sex partners.

According to Godwin, domestic partnership benefits for the regional government's estimated 1,500 employees have been available to unmarried heterosexual couples since 1983, but same-sex partners only became eligible in March 1995, a few months after Burton took office.

"Extending the coverage to same-sex couples was important to him," she says. "We haven't had any negative response."

Similar to the City of Portland guidelines, Metro employees seeking domestic partnership benefits must sign an affidavit signifying their commitment to one another.

Despite strenuous objections from some quarters, the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners unanimously approved a union package that extended medical coverage benefits to same-sex partners back in 1992, making it the first public employer in Oregon to do so.

"People are used to the idea. It's just no big deal," says Cusack.