

Postdoctoral Scholar COBRA Health Insurance Premium Reduction Eligibility

Eligible postdoctoral scholars at UNC-Chapel Hill are offered health insurance coverage through BlueCross BlueShield <http://www.bcbsnc.com/content/student/unc/pd.htm>. Postdoctoral scholars on the health insurance plan have the option to continue health insurance coverage through COBRA for 18 months following discontinuation or termination by paying the full costs of the monthly premium themselves.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) reduces the COBRA premium in some cases. The premium reduction is available to certain individuals who experience a qualifying event that is an **involuntary termination** of employment during the period beginning September 1, 2008 through December 31, 2009 (**extended date February 28, 2010**). If an individual qualifies for the premium reduction, he/she will need to pay only 35 percent of the COBRA premium otherwise due to the plan. This premium reduction is available for up to nine months. If the individual's COBRA continuation coverage lasts for more than nine months, he/she will subsequently have to pay the full amount to continue COBRA coverage. The information below clarifies the conditions constituting involuntary and voluntary termination for postdoctoral scholars as it applies to eligibility for the new COBRA premium reduction.

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill considers the following separations to be involuntary terminations that may allow the postdoctoral scholar to be eligible for the COBRA premium reduction:

- Completion of the award term (as agreed to in documented policies and procedures drafted by the funding program, department, or School) without renewal for a continuing term (but see information below regarding expiration of premium reduction upon eligibility for other group health plan coverage);
- Early termination of the award due to lack of satisfactory progress or performance as defined by the funding program, department, or School, and
- Early termination of the award due to loss of funding.

All other reasons (e.g., job change or new employment, leave of absence at the postdoctoral scholar's request) will be considered voluntary and the postdoctoral scholar will not be eligible for the premium subsidy, although he/she may be eligible to continue regular COBRA coverage as provided by the plan.

The COBRA premium reduction applies to eligible postdoctoral scholars only until the first day on which the postdoctoral scholar becomes eligible for other group health plan coverage, including group health insurance available through a spouse.

If the University determines that a postdoctoral scholar is not eligible for the COBRA premium reduction, the postdoctoral scholar can request an expedited review of the denial by appealing to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.