

CAPSule

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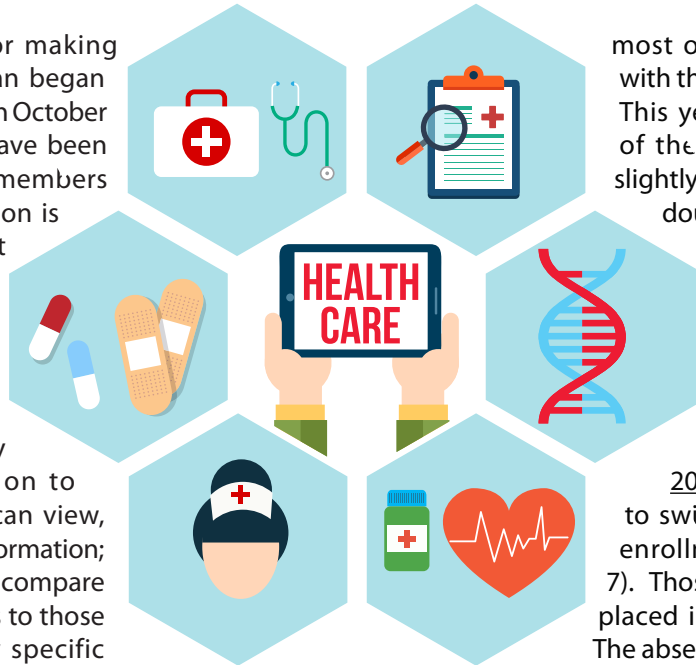
September 2016, Issue #16-09

Consider Health Plan Changes

The open enrollment period for making changes to your state health plan began September 12 and extends through October 7. Open Enrollment materials have been available online to all CalPERS members for several weeks. This information is intended to help you select the best plan for you and your family. All CalPERS members have online access to their customized Health Plan Statement in "myCalPERS." This allows members to receive health information confidentially and securely. When you sign on to your "myCalPERS" account you can view, download and print your health information; view your list of dependents and compare your health plan's 2016 premiums to those for 2017. You will also see any specific benefit changes that may impact them in the coming year. If you don't have an account, you can easily get one at www.my.calpers.ca.gov.

Your health plan expenses could increase considerably depending on which plan you have. That's why CAPS filed a grievance on behalf of all Unit 10 state scientists July 28 alleging that CalHR has miscalculated the state's 2017 contribution rates. This results from CalHR's decision to drop Blue Shield NetValue and add United Healthcare in calculating the 2017 rates. The CAPS MOU requires the state to pay 80% of the weighted average of the four largest health plans offered to state scientists by CalPERS. So each summer CalHR calculates the state's contribution to state employee health plans for the following year.

In the past, this has been a straightforward calculation, one that had the state contribution inching reliable upward, covering



most of each plan's premium increase, with the difference paid by the employee. This year, however, CalHR's calculation of the state's contribution **decreased** slightly at each of the three levels: single, double and family. So while all health premiums are INCREASING for 2017, the state plans to DECREASE its contribution.

The Blue Shield NetValue (BSN) plan won't be part of the CalPERS stable of healthcare plans in 2017. All BSN participants will need to switch to another plan during open enrollment (September 12 to October 7). Those who don't will automatically be placed into the Blue Shield Access HMO. The absence of BSN is the reason CalHR isn't using this plan as one of the top four largest plans. The result—adding the lower premiums of the United Healthcare enrollees — brings down the average overall premium used to calculate the state's 2017 contribution rates. CAPS contends that this violates the Unit 10 MOU. Instead, CalHR should be using the Blue Shield NetValue premiums in calculating the State's rates for 2017 — it is an existing and active plan this year. The grievance is on a fast track to arbitration.

You may be able to reduce your taxable income by estimating your medical expenses and setting aside out-of-pocket expenses pretax via the state's Medical Reimbursement Program. This benefit is outlined in the CAPS MOU, Section 5.8 Pre-Tax of Health/Dental/Vision Premiums. Out-of-pocket costs for health plan **premiums** are automatically deducted pretax. There is also an opportunity to set aside additional pretax funds for other anticipated qualified medical expenses. Get more information on the CalHR website: <http://www.calhr.ca.gov/>.

California State Scientists ... Knowledge, Innovation, Protection

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CAPS Decisions From August 20

This is a partial summary of actions taken by the CAPS Board of Directors at its quarterly meeting held August 20 in San Diego. Draft minutes from the meeting will be soon be available on the CAPS web page.

★ **Health Care Grievance to Arbitration.** The CAPS Board voted to proceed to arbitration in the dispute between CalHR and CAPS on the State's contribution to Health Plan premiums in 2017. Essentially, CAPS is challenging CalHR's decision to decrease the state's 2017 health care premiums. If CAPS prevails, your out-of-pocket costs for health care during 2017 would be lowered.

★ **Mission Statement.** The CAPS Board adopted: *The California Association of Professional Scientists is an independent association formed solely for the purpose of representing the interests of scientists in California state service. The membership is unified by three fundamental principles: professionalism (helping individual scientists fulfill their needs as professionals), independence (pursuing professional courses of action without regard to political influences), and responsible advocacy (firm but responsible representation in legislative matters, contract negotiations, public relations, and individual personnel actions).*

★ **Plans for the Future.** The CAPS Board approved an aggressive plan to accomplish these goals and objectives:

- » Achieving salary equity for ALL State Scientists.
- » Defending state scientists retirement, health, dental and vision benefits.
- » Funding a meaningful media outreach program.
- » Ensuring continued funding of state scientific programs and political action as it relates to the 2018 gubernatorial election.
- » Sustaining the CAPS Quarterly Grants and Dependent Scholarship Programs.
- » Maintaining a healthy financial reserve.

★ **Dues Increase.** The CAPS Board voted to increase dues and fees by \$10 monthly, the first such increase since 2007. The increase will be used to achieve CAPS' goals as listed above, and will be effective with the September 2016 pay period. Even with this increase, CAPS dues and fees are among the lowest for any state employee bargaining unit.

The next meeting of the CAPS Board is Saturday, November 5 at the Sacramento Downtown Plaza Holiday Inn (300 J Street), beginning 9 AM. Parking is available in the adjacent city lot, with reimbursement by CAPS available at the front desk. All members are WELCOME!





Know the MOU!

By Patty Velez, President

State scientists are one of just a few state employee groups covered by a legally binding Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Most other state employees are operating under an old contract and have no guarantee of future salary increases.

5% Salary Increases Guaranteed! All state scientists just received a 5% General Salary Increase, with the guarantee of two more 5% GSI's each of the next two years. These increases are far short of bringing us to full salary equity and what we deserve, but they are a significant step in the right direction.

These increases are also legally binding and virtually guaranteed. Sure, Governor Brown could change his mind if the economy goes south, and try to back out of them. If by chance he does, CAPS has the right to have the courts order them paid. I don't anticipate this will happen, but it could.

It's GOOD to Have an MOU. Having a contract in place is a very good thing (just ask someone who doesn't)! And not just for enforcing promised salary increases. There's a myriad of benefits provided under the MOU that we sometimes take for granted. You shouldn't. The benefits and workplace protections provided under the MOU can make a huge difference in your paycheck and quality of life: merit salary adjustments, business and travel expenses, parental leave, time off for blood donations, vacation leave cash out, and telecommuting, just to name a few.

I know all this because CAPS regularly helps members get the things they're entitled to under the MOU. Already one member did not receive his July 5% general salary increase. His state department somehow left him out and he needed a legal authority for it. He got more than that—he got immediate intervention by a CAPS staff professional who promptly intervened and got him paid!

"There's a myriad of benefits ... that we sometimes take for granted."

Other disputes cover hundreds or thousands of state scientists. One recent example is the calculation of the state's health benefits contribution. CalHR lowballed us on this so CAPS filed a grievance that's pending an arbitration hearing. If we win, it will mean a significant increase in take-home pay of hundreds of state scientists—all because we have an enforceable legal contract.

Do YOU know what your rights are under the CAPS MOU? If not then please take the time to review it (most of us don't through no fault of our own—there's too much going on in our lives). You can find a copy online (www.capsscscientists.org), or you can always request a hard copy from CAPS: caps@capsscscientists.org.

Contract Answers Made Easy. We can help you understand the CAPS MOU. That's why your CAPS Bargaining Team and staff have put together a series of brief, easy to view videos to explain many of the more significant contract sections. You can find these on the CAPS homepage, and under the tab for "2015/2018 CAPS MOU" at <http://capsscscientists.org/2015-2018-mou/contract-answers-made-easy/>. You will not only find these videos informative, they are bound to prompt additional questions. So feel free to ask them.

We'll produce additional videos as time goes by and more questions need to be answered. Why does CAPS do this? Simple: CAPS exists solely to serve its members. We can best do that if all of YOU have a better understanding of your legal rights, and when they might be getting violated.

On behalf of the CAPS Bargaining Team, and our staff, we want **YOU** to get every benefit to which are entitled under the MOU. That starts with having a better understanding of it, and knowing when to turn to CAPS for help. Alert us when you see a potential problem!

So please, take the time to review the MOU.



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Fighting for YOU!



Range Change Correction. A scientist new to state service recently called CAPS because she thought her job experience as a chemist should have gotten her hired at a higher salary than Range A. She had 5-plus years of experience in various chemistry positions, including contract work for a state lab. CAPS intervened and her Range was corrected immediately. The increase in pay means \$16,440 the first year alone!

MSA Denial Reversed. Another state scientist was recently denied her annual Merit Salary Adjustment, in spite of the fact that her performance reviews were all positive. Something her supervisor did not appreciate was that she had been off on leave for a work related injury. When the supervisor wouldn't relent, CAPS filed a grievance. The grievance was finally granted, but only after CAPS appealed it to the department director. The MSA was reinstated effective with the July 2016 pay period, resulting in a one-step salary increase and service credit in the range.

Exam Appeal Victory. A long-time CDPH Research Scientist I was denied entry into the RS II exam on the grounds that her science degree wasn't earned in America. Not sure what to do, she contacted CAPS for help. Ultimately, the CAPS appeal succeeded because her degree allowed her entry into the RS I exam, so there was no basis for denying its legitimacy for advancement.

If **YOU** think CAPS can help you with an employment related problem, don't hesitate to contact us: caps@capsscientists.org!