

CARROT

5 things I wish I knew
before purchasing
fertility benefits



Introduction

When our team started looking into fertility benefits, none of us — including our broker — were familiar with the space. Most of us hadn’t been through anything fertility related, either. But we'd heard from employees that there was a serious gap in our existing support for family forming, so we knew we needed to identify the right solution to meet their needs.

We ultimately talked with seven different vendors and learned a ton about how various fertility benefits work and the pros and cons of each. While it all worked out in the end, and we're thrilled with our fertility benefits provider, there are a few things I wish I'd known before starting this process to save us some time — and a few headaches.



About Hannah:

Hannah Lincecum, SHRM-CP, is the California Regional Senior HR Manager at Reed Smith, where she’s managed and led various HR projects for four years. Most recently, Hannah’s team launched the firm’s global Family Network, a unique program designed to support all life stages of employees’ immediate and extended families, including comprehensive employment benefits.

In this guide, I'll share:



What to consider about your existing coverage before you start your search



Basic research to conduct first to help understand some of the nuances of fertility and family forming



What to look for in a global fertility benefit



How we chose our fertility benefits vendor

01

Make sure you understand your existing fertility coverage — and where it might be limited.

One of the most challenging parts of our fertility benefits search was deciding whether to keep fertility benefits as part of our insurance plan or to carve fertility coverage out. Our team spent a lot of time first learning about our existing plan's limitations, then weighing each option's pros and cons. We realized that in order to use the fertility benefit that existed in our insurance plan, employees would need an infertility diagnosis, defined as trying to get pregnant without success for six to 12 months, depending on age. Those requirements leave out or create a significant barrier for same-sex couples and single-intending parents. Options were also limited to fertility care; paths like adoption and donor-assisted reproduction weren't part of our plan.

For us, we decided that carving fertility benefits out of our own insurance plan was the most inclusive option. Depending on your existing plans, a carved-in approach might work better for your company. Making sure you have a thorough understanding of how your plan works is an important first step either way.

My advice:

Consider how many of your employees may be on their spouse or partner's plan and whether carving in would limit access.

What restrictions does your health plan include? Would those restrictions still apply if you incorporated fertility benefits? Can you negotiate any restrictions with your provider?

02

Fertility and family forming are more complex than most people realize.

Did you know that donor-assisted reproduction often involves lawyers, too? Or that most people go through three cycles of in vitro fertilization (IVF) before getting pregnant? Family forming can be much more complicated than I realized before starting this process. Vendors like Carrot did a great job of describing some of what different journeys involve and what support looks like for each, but learning about some of these journeys, and the medical terminology, on your own can also help your team understand what you're looking for and spot when something is missing. Keep in mind the needs not just of heterosexual couples, but of same-sex couples, too. Besides having coverage for fertility treatments like IVF, we wanted employees to be able to access sperm banks, egg donor agencies, gestational surrogacy, as well as fertility preservation options.

Learning about the complexities of family forming also helped us decide whether we wanted to go with a vendor that offered a focused approach rather than trying to incorporate every aspect of fertility, parenting, childcare, and more into one solution. In our experience, the solutions that tried to do everything ended up cutting corners in some places, which wasn't aligned with the experience we wanted our employees to have while pursuing parenthood. We ultimately chose a provider dedicated to fertility and family forming that gave employees access to care navigation and expertise for every fertility health journey and pursuit of parenthood.

My advice:

Listen to personal stories about fertility and family forming from your employees. These stories can help you both build the case for fertility benefits and understand what your program should include.

If you can, learn a bit about what's involved in different family-forming journeys. Carrot put together a useful [**guide to being a supportive manager**](#) that outlines what each journey typically involves.

Consider the scope of the support you're looking for. Sometimes, programs that try to be "everything for everyone" don't provide the depth of expertise employees need.

03

Rules and regulations related to fertility and family forming vary significantly around the world.

We wanted to make sure our fertility benefits were available to employees in countries outside the U.S. We learned during the evaluation process that global benefits parity for fertility coverage can be challenging for a few different reasons. For one, some services available in the U.S. are not available in other countries or are restricted. Gestational carrier (GC) services (commonly known as surrogacy) aren't allowed in some countries or are only allowed if the GC doesn't receive compensation.

Cultural differences between countries also influence how easy or difficult types of fertility care are to access. We didn't want to be in a position where we announced that we had a new benefit available to everyone but then had to walk that back. We looked for a fertility benefits vendor with a deep understanding of fertility care in different parts of the world that could help us provide as much benefits parity as possible and tailor the benefit to each location, where needed.

My advice:

If you're talking to a vendor and they're the first ones to bring up nuances in global fertility care, that's a good sign. Ideally, your vendor will have both a knowledge base on global fertility in-house and experts on the ground in the regions where your employees are located.

While it might not be possible to offer support for every journey in every location, the right vendor will have solutions to support as many of your employees as possible. In some cases, employees may be able to seek fertility services in other countries through cross-border care if they're unable to access what they need within their country. Care coordination support is crucial for these complex journeys.

Ask vendors what they mean when they say they're "available" in the countries where your employees are located. What specific support can employees access? Are their relationships through third parties, or are they actually connected to the places your employees will receive care?

04

Consider how employees will pay for care and how your team will manage compliance.

For us, we knew that first-dollar coverage for care was a priority from the start. Knowing that fertility and family-forming care often costs tens of thousands of dollars, we didn't want employees to have to wait for reimbursement or be unable to access care because they didn't have enough cash or room on their credit card.

Our team also learned a lot about taxation rules related to employer-sponsored funds and fertility care. Whether or not a benefit is taxed depends on factors like the kind of care someone receives and whether or not they're enrolled in a high-deductible health plan with a health savings account. Personally, I learned more than I ever wanted to about this topic! Ideally, your fertility benefits vendor will handle this on their end, as it gets quite complicated.

My advice:

Keep income diversity in mind when you're thinking about how your employees will pay for care. The average person isn't in the position to spend thousands of dollars on care and then wait for reimbursement.

Partner with your finance team for help understanding some of the finer details around how employer-sponsored funds for fertility will work in terms of taxation and health savings accounts.

If you have employees outside the U.S., ask vendors about how they handle managing different currencies and taxation laws in other locations.

05

Quality and breadth of network matters.

Network size and quality are something else to consider when evaluating fertility benefits and considering whether or not to carve them into your insurance plan. We wanted to find a benefit that had a large enough network to support all of our employees but that didn't cut any corners when it came to quality.

Care navigation is also a key piece of fertility coverage. When we started looking into fertility benefits, we knew that we wanted concierge-level service available to help our employees learn about their options and all of the steps involved. We learned through our vetting process that clinical navigation can help reduce costs, as well. For example, while IVF is important to support, it's not the right option for everyone, and sometimes there are less-invasive pathways to try first.

My advice:

If you're going to support pursuits of parenthood in addition to fertility treatments, such as adoption and donor-assisted reproduction, make sure your fertility benefit vendor also has a network of adoption agencies, sperm banks, egg donor agencies, etc.

How does the vendor vet their network? Do they rely on your existing insurance network, or do they have their own?

How do employees know where to start when they first sign up for their benefit? Do certain paths seem to be emphasized more than others?

Why Reed Smith chose Carrot

In our search, Carrot stood out for a few different reasons. To start, they did a great job of setting the stage and providing an overview of why the need for fertility benefits is growing, current employer adoption of fertility benefits, and how a comprehensive plan can support employee recruitment and retention goals. Here are a few other reasons we chose Carrot as our fertility benefits provider:



Support for everyone and every journey.

By providing access to Carrot separate from our medical plan, we're able to support every pursuit of parenthood regardless of sex, gender identity, relationship status, or location.



Global expertise.

Everyone we spoke with at Carrot was so knowledgeable about global fertility care and answered all of our questions. Carrot is available in more than 120 countries, so we knew our employees would be supported no matter where they are in the world.



Large, high-quality network.

Carrot members have access to 3,600+ clinics globally and 2,500+ attorneys and agencies supporting adoption, gestational surrogacy, and more.

The fertility benefits search process can feel overwhelming, but the messages you'll get from employees saying you helped make it possible for them to grow their family makes it all worth it. I hope my advice can help make your search a bit smoother so you can identify the right solution for your employees as soon as possible.



Compliance and taxation support.

Carrot worked closely with us to address all of the taxation and compliance questions we had and made it easier for us to stay compliant. The other vendors we spoke with did not offer this level of support.



Carrot Card.

With the Carrot Card, employees are able to use their employer-sponsored fund when they receive care, rather than wait for reimbursement. We were able to meet our goal of offering first-dollar support by giving employees access to the Carrot Card.

About Carrot

Carrot Fertility is the leading global fertility care platform for women, who are often at the center of fertility care decisions and consequences. Plus, Carrot serves people of every age, race, income, sex, sexual orientation, gender, marital status, and geography. Trusted by hundreds of multinational employers, health plans, and health systems, Carrot's comprehensive clinical program delivers industry-leading cost savings for employers and award-winning experiences for millions of people worldwide. Whether there is a need for care through fertility preservation, male-factor infertility, pre-pregnancy, IVF, pregnancy and postpartum, adoption, gestational surrogacy, or menopause, Carrot supports members and their families through many of the most memorable and meaningful moments of their lives.

Carrot has received national and international recognition for its pioneering work, including Best Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion Product from the Anthem Awards, Fast Company's Most Innovative Companies, CNBC's 100 Barrier Breaking Startups, and more. Carrot is regularly featured in media reporting on issues related to the future of work, women in leadership, healthcare innovation and diversity, equity, and inclusion, including MSNBC, The Economist, Bloomberg, The Wall Street Journal, CNBC, National Public Radio, Harvard Business Review, and more.

Carrot is fully distributed, with teams in more than 40 states across the United States and dozens of countries around the world. It has received numerous workplace awards, including Fortune's Best Workplaces in Healthcare, Quartz's Best Companies for Remote Workers, and Great Place to Work and Age-Friendly Employer certifications. Learn more at [carrotfertility.com](https://www.carrotfertility.com).