

495—6.5(97B) Covered wage treatment for employer contributions to IRC Section 125 plans. If certain conditions are met, employer contributions to fringe benefit programs that qualify under IRC Section 125 may be treated as covered wages. The following subrules set forth IPERS' regulations for determining covered wage treatment and for making wage adjustments when employer-paid contributions have been covered or excluded in violation of the standards set forth below.

6.5(1) Section 125 plans. For purposes of this rule, a Section 125 plan means an employer-sponsored fringe benefit plan that is subject to Section 125 of the federal Internal Revenue Code (IRC). Some of the common names for this type of plan are cafeteria plan, flexible benefits plan, flex plan, and flexible spending arrangement.

a. Effective January 1, 2017, employers must annually certify to IPERS, on a form approved by the system, that their Section 125 plans meet all IRC requirements.

b. If an employer does not certify its Section 125 plan's compliance with the IRC, all employer contributions to fringe benefit plans will be excluded from IPERS coverage.

6.5(2) Elective employer contributions. For purposes of this rule, "elective employer contributions" means employer contributions made to a Section 125 plan that can be received in cash or used to purchase benefits under the Section 125 plan. Generally, elective employer contributions that are not subject to special eligibility requirements qualify as covered wages.

6.5(3) Mandatory minimum coverage requirements. The term "elective employer contributions" does not include employer contributions that must be used to purchase benefits under a Section 125 plan. For example, if an employer provides \$2,500 to its employees to purchase benefits in a Section 125 plan, but requires that all employees must use \$1,000 of that amount to purchase single health coverage, the cost of the single coverage is deducted. In this example, \$1,000 would be subtracted from the \$2,500 provided, resulting in \$1,500 of covered wages.

6.5(4) Uniformity determined coverage group by coverage group. Iowa Code section 97B.1A(26) "a"(1)"b" states that elective employer contributions shall be treated as covered wages only if made uniformly available and not limited to highly compensated employees. The application of the uniformity concept may be illustrated as follows: Employer Z has two major groupings of employees covered under its cafeteria plan: teaching staff and support staff. Every member of the teaching staff is provided \$3,000 to purchase benefits under the Section 125 plan. Every member of the teaching staff must take single coverage costing \$1,500. Every member of the support staff is provided \$2,500 and must also take the single coverage costing \$1,500. Each member of the teaching staff would have \$1,500 treated as covered wages, and each member of the support staff would have \$1,000 treated as covered wages. This would be considered uniform treatment.

Uniformity is not destroyed by the fact that the amount available to members of a coverage group varies because the actual cost of mandatory minimum coverage varies depending on actuarial factors that apply to each individual. For example, assume Employer Z above also requires each employee to have long-term disability coverage. In Employer Z's case, the actual cost of disability coverage will vary from individual to individual. In that case, Employer Z would also deduct the actual cost of the required disability coverage, individual by individual, when determining IPERS-covered wages.

Uniformity is not destroyed if an employer has two groups of employees who, as a result of collective bargaining, have differing entitlements to employer contributions. For example, Employer Y has a contract that provides \$3,500 to each employee to purchase benefits under the Section 125 plan. Every employee may take all the cash by waiving participation in the plan, or may use all or part of the employer contributions to the Section 125 plan. In the collective bargaining process, a new contract is adopted which states that the employer will still provide \$3,500 to each employee to purchase benefits under the Section 125 plan. However, under the new contract, persons who waived participation before April 15 may still waive participation in the plan and take all the cash, but persons who did not waive participation and those hired after April 15 must have single coverage costing \$1,700. Employer Y would be treated as having two groups of employees with different elective employer contribution amounts. The grandfathered group (employees who waived participation before April 15) would have covered wages of \$3,500, and the group consisting of those who did not waive participation before April 15 and new employees would have covered wages of \$1,800.

6.5(5) *Highly compensated employee test.* Iowa Code chapter 97B provides that, in addition to being uniformly available, employer contributions must not discriminate in favor of highly compensated employees (HCEs). For purposes of this subrule, an HCE is an employee who has reported wages and tips subject to Medicare tax in excess of the IRC Section 414(q) limit then in effect. IPERS shall apply the HCE limitation as follows. If elective employer contributions are made available to HCEs, the total elective employer contributions made available to the HCE group must not exceed 25 percent of the total elective employer contributions made available under the Section 125 plan to all employees, including the HCEs. If the elective employer contributions available to the HCE group exceed the 25 percent limit (or if it is determined that the Section 125 plan discriminates in favor of HCEs under other IRS rules), elective employer contributions for HCEs shall not exceed the highest amount available to a nonexecutive coverage group of employees covered under such plan. The general application of these principles is illustrated below, using the 2002 IRC Section 414(q) dollar limit of \$90,000.

Employer W has a Section 125 plan that provides elective employer contributions totaling \$7,000 to executive staff, \$4,500 to teaching staff, and \$3,500 to support staff. There are no other limits or exclusions that apply. These amounts are treated as covered wages for each member of each group, provided that the total amount of contributions made available to HCEs does not exceed 25 percent of the total elective employer contributions for all employees covered under the plan. If elective employer contributions for the executive staff totaled \$70,000, and total elective employer contributions for the remainder of the staff totaled \$500,000, the HCE percentage of total elective employer contributions would be 12 percent (\$70,000 divided by \$570,000), and all elective employer contributions would be treated as covered wages for all groups. However, if elective employer contributions for the executive staff totaled \$70,000, and elective employer contributions for the remainder of the staff totaled \$200,000, the HCE percentage would be 26 percent (\$70,000 divided by \$270,000), and HCEs' elective employer contributions would be limited to \$4,500 per HCE for covered wage purposes.

6.5(6) *Elective employer contributions limited to dual coverage employees.* In some cases, a Section 125 plan provides for what appear to be mandatory employer contributions for health plan coverage, but the terms of the Section 125 plan permit dual coverage employees to waive coverage and receive the employer contributions in cash, if the employee can prove coverage under another health care plan. IPERS shall continue to treat the full amount of employer contributions in such cases as not being IPERS-covered wages, even though individual employees with the described dual coverage may actually receive the employer contribution in cash.

[**ARC 8929B**, IAB 7/14/10, effective 6/21/10; **ARC 9068B**, IAB 9/8/10, effective 10/13/10; **ARC 2402C**, IAB 2/17/16, effective 3/23/16; **ARC 4337C**, IAB 3/13/19, effective 4/17/19]