

# LABOR CONNECTION

Fall 2023

## When Health, Quality of Life Matters



For more than 80 years, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois (BCBSIL) has built a reputation second to none. In fact, global data and analytics company J.D. Power ranked us the top insurance company in customer satisfaction with Illinois and Indiana commercial health plans.<sup>1</sup>

With the depth and coverage of our provider networks, customers trust the medical insurance we provide. But did you know that BCBSIL offers a lot more than just medical?

We offer our customers a wealth of ancillary benefits that blends seamlessly with our medical coverage. Customers get a comprehensive approach to achieving better health, wellness, financial security and peace of mind. Combining medical with ancillary benefits enables us to focus on supporting better overall health with medical, life insurance, accidental death and disability and dental offerings.

### Dental insurance

Through our full service or Labor Fund Dental Network Program, we are confident in the value we can provide you. Our dental network is one of the largest in America.

A recent BCBSIL study confirms that members who have a condition such as diabetes, coronary artery disease or asthma can significantly lower medical costs and live healthier lives when they maintain good oral health. Regular preventive services for at-risk populations, the study found, could reduce medical costs by an average of 24% compared to those not receiving dental care.

### Life, AD&D insurance

Life insurance plays an important part in helping your members' loved ones to pay debts, rent or mortgage, provide

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## CONTENTS

Someone You Should Know: Meet Bob Reiter, President Chicago Federation of Labor .....	2
Apprentice Program: Plumbers & Pipefitters Local 286 ..	3
This and That: Labor Fund News.....	4

Embracing the Community .....	4
To Your Good Health: A Better Way of Treating Back Pain .....	5

## When Health, Quality of Life Matters (CONTINUED)

for themselves and cover funeral and medical costs after their death. Many people need life insurance to financially protect their family in case of premature death.

Depending on the plan, members with life insurance will have online access to create, modify and store a last will and

testament. Life insurance also offers online pre-planning for funeral and services, which often can cost tens of thousands of dollars.

Contact your labor account executive to learn more about the opportunities available to funds to support their members.

Source:

1. [Normalizing Utilization and Pivot to Value-Based Care Delivery Models Present Opportunities for Employer-Sponsored Health Plans](#), J.D. Power, May 26, 2022

## Someone You Should Know



### Meet Bob Reiter, President Chicago Federation of Labor

**Bob Reiter**, President of the Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL), says that “he has unions in his blood.” And that blood connection runs deep.

A native of Lockport, Bob’s maternal grandfather was foreman of a derailment crew

for the railway and his maternal grandmother was a railway clerk in Peoria, where they met. On his father’s side, his grandfather was a heavy equipment operator for the International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE) Local 150. Bob’s father was also a Local 150 member, making Bob and his brother third-generation members of Local 150. Bob’s mother was an ER nurse, and his sister is a teacher.

#### Lifelong committment

Bob has been steeped with labor for most of his life. While in college he worked construction and then worked at Local 150 while attending law school. Upon receiving his law degree, Bob dedicated himself to fighting for workers rights and growing the labor movement. He later returned to Local 150 for four years. He then moved to the CFL, where he was secretary-treasurer for eight years prior to being named president.

Bob sees his role at the CFL as engaging workers across the board on issues impacting them and their families, giving them a stronger voice and protecting their rights.

According to Bob, unions have helped spur the rapid surge in workers activism that started with the Occupy Wall Street movement. Even though national union membership is at an historic low at 10%, Chicago – bucking the national trend – has held its ground and continues to expand.

#### Fighting the good fight

The CFL works at the city and state level to advocate for workers’ wages. He believes if we are to have an equitable consumer-based economy, then consumers with jobs need to be able to afford the products and services they provide.

Bob believes the CFL is the embodiment of their membership. He and the CFL have helped set the union standard for paid leave in Illinois, raised the minimum wage and helped workers across the board. That focus and dedication is not going to stop.

#### Time alone

He enjoys working out, cooking and attending live concerts. His concert venues have included everything from Pearl Jam to Depeche Mode, Ozzy Osborn to The Cure. As a teenager, Bob was big on reading song liner notes. He encourages people to pay attention to the lyrics and the message the artist is conveying. He also enjoys the Chicago White Sox, Bulls and Sky.

Bob holds a bachelor’s and master’s degree in political science from Eastern Illinois University and a Juris Doctor degree from Illinois Tech Chicago-Kent College of Law. He lives in Lockport with his wife, two daughters and two dogs.



*Joe Cooper and his wife, Montana, and their two children, Vanessa and Amber.*

## Apprentice Program: Plumbers & Pipefitters Local 286

There's good news and bad news if you are living in and around Austin, Texas. The bad news is that traffic is horrible. The good news is that there's a lot of work, especially for those lucky enough to be in the construction trades.

According to Joe Cooper, Director of Plumbers & Pipefitters Local 286 Apprentice program, they are "blessed with work" and "busting at the seams." The Fund just recently purchased the building next to them to accommodate for their growth.

Construction is booming in the state's capital with the help of the CHIPS Act and Inflation Reduction Act of 2022. Companies are taking office space and converting it to manufacturing, the health care sector is expanding and building new facilities, and skyscrapers are going up throughout downtown Austin.

### Apprentice Program

Key to having qualified people to fill the market's employment needs is Local 286's apprentice program. The Fund recently accepted 126 apprentices into their new Sept. 5 class. These apprentices joined 467 apprentices currently in the Fund's five-year apprenticeship program, which has three tracks – Plumbing, Pipefitting and HVAC-R. Joe oversees 43 instructors teaching part-time in the evenings.

The curriculum comes from the United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters (UA). Under the umbrella of the UA,

the program receives tools needed to train apprentices. The Fund takes part in MC3, Multi-Craft Core Curriculum, which is a comprehensive pre-apprenticeship training curriculum.

Prospective members are provided a general orientation to apprenticeship and trained in CPR and first aid – an OSHA 10-hour certification course – blueprint reading and applied mathematics for construction application. The goal is to have 100% job placement, get everyone into a registered apprenticeship program and keep highly trained members in the jobs pipeline.

### No Strings Attached

Joe has seen a lot of change at the Fund since he started 28 years ago. A union that had 300 total members now has nearly 600 in the apprenticeship program alone. The biggest change over the years has been the rapid advancements in technology. When he started, everything was done with strings and drop lines.

Now members are trained on BIM, Building Information Modeling. Everything is built virtually and finished before getting to the site, making construction projects more efficient.

Born and raised in Austin, Joe has been married to his beautiful wife, Montana, since 2000. They have two daughters, Vanessa and Amber, both of whom have been welding in the training center since they were children.

So even though his commute has gone from 10 minutes to 45 minutes, it's a good problem to have.

## This and That

The Chicago Federation of Labor kicked off the Labor Day weekend with their annual celebration on Aug 30. The event was held at McCormick Place Lakeside Centers outside Terrace overlooking Lake Michigan.

Labor leaders enthusiastically greeted Dr. Jill Biden, First Lady of the United States, and a proud, card-carrying union member. Biden touted unions as the backbone of this country that built the middle class. Also attending were Ill. Gov. J.B. Pritzker and Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson.



Robert Reiter, President Chicago Federation of Labor, left, with Dr. Jill Biden, First Lady of the United States.

## Embracing the Community

Helping our members and communities to be healthy and well is part of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois mission. Our efforts to create a better health care system include programs to bring care and education to all communities in Illinois.

We showed that community commitment in a two-day July event when we hosted three dozen Chicago community youth organizations to the first-ever NASCAR Chicago Street Race Weekend. As a founding partner of the event, we want to help

these groups and others build youth development in underserved communities in the city's South and Southwest neighborhoods.

But we are giving to the community in other ways. We recently awarded \$3.8 million in Blue Impact Grants to 76 nonprofit organizations committed to health and wellness of Illinois residents. We also hosted a hiring event at our new Pilsen office. The center will employ 300 customer service advocates and other personnel.

The Pilsen facility will become our 18th in Illinois meeting the rising demand for Spanish-language member inquiries.



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## A Better Way of Treating Back Pain

Half of all Americans experiences back, neck, shoulder or other [musculoskeletal \(MSK\) pain](#). In fact, MSK care remains as one of the highest cost drivers in American health care, consuming one-sixth of employer-sponsored dollars and costing [\\$600 billion to the U.S. economy](#).

MSK is a particular concern among labor accounts where personal safety is central to work. To deliver solutions, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois (BCBSIL) has partnered with Hinge Health®.

According to Hinge Health, the labor market and private sector share the same concern. Nine of every 10 employers today who don't already have a digital MSK solution say they will likely adopt one within a year.

### MSK Solution

Hinge Health is a digital health company offering an MSK program that turns established, non-surgical care guidelines into a coach and physical therapist-led program. The resources they provide are delivered remotely using mobile, wearable and computer-guided technology.

Hinge Health provides all the tools needed for your workers to get moving again from the comfort of home. Hinge Health is available to labor groups who package certain holistic health solutions. Talk with your account executive to learn more.

The program provides:

- Exercise therapy tailored to specific needs
- Technology for instant feedback in an app
- A personal coach and physical therapist

The good news for Funds: it's available at no cost to the member —100% covered for eligible BCBSIL members. Funds can receive regular reporting at least twice a year, enrollment summaries and member engagement and outcomes.

Contact your labor account executive today to learn more about how Hinge Health might benefit your Fund.

Hinge Health is an independent company that has contracted with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois to provide an online musculoskeletal program for members with coverage through BCBSIL. BCBSIL makes no endorsement, representations or warranties regarding third-party vendors and the products and services offered by them.

Sources: [Half of All Americans Have MSK Pain](#), EHS Today, 2022; Hinge Health Issues 2023 State of Musculoskeletal Care Report, HingeHealth.com, March 23, 2023



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INSIDE

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### Apprentice Program: Plumbers & Pipefitters Local 286



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