

February 2011

Funding Adoption: Adoption Packet 2

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This packet is for prospective adoptive parents and others interested in learning more about costs of adoption and available resources. Contents include:

- Costs of Adopting
- Adoption Assistance for Children Adopted From Foster Care
- Employer-Provided Adoption Benefits

The Child Welfare Information Gateway website offers many more resources about all types of adoption:

www.childwelfare.gov/adoption



Child Welfare Information Gateway

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FACTSHEET
FOR FAMILIES

February 2011

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www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/s_costsp/index.cfm

Costs of Adopting



Prospective adoptive parents may be concerned about the costs of adopting a child and their ability to meet those costs. Becoming a parent is rarely free of expenses—pregnancy and childbirth can be expensive and even more so without adequate insurance—and adoptive parents may be faced with initial costs that seem challenging. However, with planning and knowledge about the different types of adoptions and available resources, they

What's Inside:

- Universal expenses
- Adoption-specific expenses
- Resources to help defray adoption costs
- Additional resources

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can develop a budget to include most of the foreseeable expenses. This factsheet explains these expenses so that prospective adoptive parents can make informed decisions throughout the adoption process.

Costs of adopting may be minimal or can total more than \$40,000, depending on a number of factors. The chart below outlines some general categories of adoption and costs associated with the services provided. The wide range reflects the multitude of factors that can affect costs, including the type of adoption, type of placement agency or facilitator, and child's age and circumstances. Prospective adoptive parents are encouraged to check with the agencies they are considering to find out more about specific costs for their circumstances.

RANGE OF ADOPTION COSTS

| | |
|--|---------------------|
| Public Agency (Foster Care) Adoptions | \$0 - \$2,500 |
| Licensed Private Agency Adoptions | \$5,000 - \$40,000+ |
| Independent Adoptions | \$8,000 - \$40,000+ |
| Facilitated/Unlicensed Adoptions | \$5,000 - \$40,000+ |
| Intercountry Adoptions | \$15,000 - \$30,000 |

While the overall figures may seem daunting, prospective adoptive parents should explore all adoption options and the associated costs for each. In some cases,

the total costs may be much less than the maximum figures cited here; resources may also be available to help offset all or many costs. These are discussed at the end of this factsheet.

Breaking down the total cost into categorized expenses helps prospective parents understand what is involved and how to determine a predictable range for their costs. In some cases, understanding the costs associated with different types of adoption may help parents decide which type of adoption to pursue, or whether to pursue this approach to building a family.

This factsheet can help by outlining and discussing the following categories of expenses:

- **Universal expenses:** that is, those that occur for every type of adoption, including home study expenses and court costs.
- **Adoption-specific expenses:** that is, those that are associated with a particular type of adoption, including public agency (foster care) adoptions, private (licensed private agency or facilitated) adoptions, and intercountry (foreign or international) adoptions.

Many adoptive parents pay some combination of universal and adoption-specific expenses. Many public agencies waive home study costs, reimburse most or all expenses, and offer an adoption subsidy that is up to the foster care payment amount for a qualifying child up until the age of 18 or 21, depending on the child's characteristics.

Child Welfare Information Gateway offers a factsheet for parents, *Adoption Options*, that describes the different types of adoptions: www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_adoptionoption.cfm

Universal Expenses

Universal expenses are incurred by everyone who adopts a child. (In some cases, they may be offset by reimbursements or other resources.) These expenses include home study expenses and court costs.

Home Study Expenses

A home study must be completed for all prospective parents, no matter what type of adoption they intend to pursue.¹ In the case of public agency adoptions, these most often are completed by the local public agency or its contractors; for other types of adoption, private agencies or certified social workers conduct the home study. The purpose of the home study is to prepare the prospective parents for the adoption, gather information about them so that an appropriate match between the child and parents can be made, and evaluate

¹ The Information Gateway Glossary defines “home study” as a “process of mutually assessing and preparing prospective foster, adoptive, or kinship families to determine their suitability to foster or adopt and determine the type of child whose needs would best be met by them. A home study may include a range of evaluative activities, visits to the family’s residence, and educational activities.” (www.childwelfare.gov/admin/glossary/glossaryh.cfm)

the fitness of the parents. Home studies culminate in the social worker’s written report, which includes a recommendation about whether the prospective parents are qualified to adopt and, if so, what type of child or children (in terms of characteristics) would be most appropriate (for more information, read Information Gateway’s *The Adoption Home Study Process* at www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_homstu.cfm).

Usually prospective parents pay for the home study. In the case of public agency adoptions, home study fees may be minimal (\$500) or completely waived, although parents may incur fees for medical or psychological evaluations that could be required. With other types of adoption, a private agency adoption facilitator may charge \$1,000 to \$3,000 for the home study. In some cases, the fee for the home study may be included in the overall private attorney or private agency fee. Information about all fees should be provided in writing by the agency or social worker, and prospective parents should ask for such information.

Legal Fees

All domestic adoptions and some intercountry adoptions must be finalized in a court in the United States. Some intercountry adoptions are finalized in the child’s country of origin. Although not required in these situations, parents often choose also to finalize the placement in a U.S. court. All of these procedures in private or intercountry adoption incur a cost.

In public agency adoptions, most States have a nonrecurring cost allowance that should cover all or most of the adoptive

parents' attorney fees. The cost for court document preparation can range from \$500 to \$2,000, while the cost for representing adoptive parents in an uncontested adoption can range from \$2,500 to \$6,000. (Again, some or all of these costs may be reimbursable.) In some jurisdictions, adoptions can be finalized without representation by an attorney.

Adoption-Specific Expenses

In addition to the costs common to every adoption, adoptive parents generally incur costs specific to their type of adoption. The costs for three types of adoption are described here: public agency, domestic private agency, and intercountry. These expenses are in addition to the universal expenses described above in most cases.

Public Agency Adoption Costs: \$0 to \$2,500

Most public agencies place their primary focus on placing children from the foster care system, although some also place voluntarily relinquished infants. Many children in foster care may be defined as having special needs, a category that is defined differently in each State but may refer to children who must be placed with siblings, who are older or in a minority group, or those with disabilities. To read more about definitions of "special needs," see Information Gateway's *"Special Needs" Adoption: What Does It Mean?* at www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/specialneeds

Up-front fees and expenses for public agency adoptions can be as much as \$2,500, including attorney's fees and travel expenses. In this type of adoption, fees often are very low or even waived so that final costs to parents are negligible. In some cases, the child may be eligible for government subsidy payments (often called adoption assistance), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or Medicaid coverage. (These resources are described at the end of this factsheet.)

Private Adoption Costs: \$5,000 to \$40,000

Private adoption costs vary widely according to the type of agency used and, sometimes, the individual adoption circumstances. It is important for prospective parents to fully understand what is included in private agency, adoption facilitator, and attorney fees. In some cases, the cost of the home study is included, rather than broken out separately.

Private adoptions fall into three general categories, each with its own attendant costs:

Licensed Private Agency Adoption Costs: Approximately \$5,000 to \$40,000. Costs for this type of adoption include a fee charged by the agency and may also include the cost of the home study, birth parent counseling, adoptive parent preparation and training, and social work services involved in matching a child to a prospective family. The fees charged by licensed agencies are generally consistent within a range, and some even have sliding fee scales based on family income. In addition, some agencies

may offer reduced fees to prospective parents who locate a birth parent on their own but who seek out the agency for counseling, facilitation, home study, and supervision services.

**Independent Adoption Costs:
Approximately \$8,000 to \$40,000
(average is \$10,000 to \$15,000).**

Independent adoptions handled by an attorney generally result in costs that may include medical expenses for the birth mother (as allowed by law) as well as separate legal fees for representing adoptive and birth parents. Allowable fees for advertising may also be included. Additional medical expenses may be required in situations in which there are birth complications.

State laws restrict many of these costs, including any reimbursements to the birth mother. Restrictions may also exist regarding advertisements seeking expectant parents. Where allowed, such advertising expenses may range from \$500 to \$5,000. The Information Gateway publication *Regulation of Private Domestic Adoption Expenses* has more information about State laws regulating these types of adoption expenses:

www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/expenses.cfm

Compared to licensed agency adoptions, the costs of independent adoptions may be less predictable and have been known to be much more than \$40,000. In addition, costs may not be reimbursable in cases in which a birth mother changes her mind and chooses to parent her child.

**Facilitated/Unlicensed Adoption Costs:
\$5,000 to \$40,000.** These costs are

generally the same as costs of licensed agencies. However, in States that allow adoptive placements by facilitators, these placements are largely unregulated. This means there is no regulation in terms of the services provided or the expertise of the facilitator. Prospective parents may have no recourse if the adoption does not proceed as expected.

**Intercountry Adoption Costs:
Approximately \$15,000 to \$30,000**

Agencies that provide intercountry adoption services charge fees that may range from \$15,000 to \$30,000. These fees generally include dossier and immigration processing and court costs. In some cases, they include a required donation to the foreign orphanage or agency.² Overall costs can be affected by the type of entity in the country that is responsible for placing the child (e.g., government agency, government orphanage, charitable foundation, attorney, facilitator, or some combination thereof). Many intercountry adoption agencies do offer a sliding fee scale based on the adoptive parents' income.

Depending on the country, there can be additional costs, such as:

- Child foster care (usually in South and Central American adoptions)
- Parents' travel and in-country stay(s) to process the adoption abroad
- Escorting fees, charged when parents do not travel but instead hire escorts to accompany the child on the flight

² See Information Gateway's glossary for a definition of "dossier" in adoption: www.childwelfare.gov/admin/glossary/glossaryd.cfm

- Child’s medical care and treatment (occasionally in South and Central America)
- Translation fees
- Foreign attorney fees
- Foreign agency fees
- Passport fees
- Visa processing fees and costs of visa medical examination

Resources to Help Defray Adoption Costs

In many cases, tax credits, subsidies, employer benefits, and loans or grants can help with adoption costs.

Tax Credits

Adoption tax credits may be available to defray some adoption costs. The amount may depend on family income, whether the child is designated as “special needs,” and any other adoption benefits.³ Parents may want to check with a tax professional to determine applicable benefits. With the passage of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoption Act of 2008, States are required to inform any individual who is adopting of their eligibility for the adoption tax credit.

Federal Tax Credits, Tax Exclusion, and Refundable Credits. Prospective adoptive parents may qualify for an adoption

tax credit (an amount subtracted from their tax liability). They may also be able to exclude from their income some amounts paid to them or for them by their employer under a qualified adoption assistance program. Find information about tax credits and tax exclusion for adoption at the IRS website: www.irs.gov/taxtopics/tc607.html

The 2010 passage of the Affordable Care Act (P.L. 111-148) revised the adoption tax credit by:

- Extending the credit’s expiration date
- Increasing the maximum adoption credit and the amount that can be excluded from income
- Making the adoption credit refundable, which can reduce tax liability and potentially result in an IRS refund if the credit exceeds the liability

The IRS offers frequently asked questions and answers about adoption taxes credits, exclusions, and refundable credits for adoption on its website:

www.irs.gov/individuals/article/0,,id=231663,00.html

Parents also should find out about the IRS adoption taxpayer identification number (www.irs.gov/individuals/article/0,,id=96452,00.html), which is used for temporary identification when adopting taxpayers do not have the child’s Social Security number.

State tax credits. Several States have enacted tax credits for families adopting children from the public child welfare

³ To read more about definitions of “special needs,” see Information Gateway’s “Special Needs” Adoption: What Does It Mean? at www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/specialneeds

system. Some States restrict the credit to adoptions from foster care.⁴

Subsidies and Reimbursements for Children With Special Needs

Definitions of children with special needs vary for each State, but they often include children who are older, have disabilities, belong to a minority group, or must be placed with siblings. To facilitate the adoption of these children, who often are in foster care, States may provide reimbursements for some adoption costs, as well as subsidies for some children. The Information Gateway factsheet “*Special Needs*” Adoption: What Does It Mean? provides more information on this topic: www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/specialneeds

Reimbursement for Adoption Costs.

After families have finalized the adoption of a child with special needs from the public child welfare system, they may be able to apply for reimbursement of expenses they paid related to the adoption, including home study fees, travel expenses to see the child, and attorney fees. Most States, under a Federal match program, offer nonrecurring adoption expenses reimbursements up to a set limit (which cannot exceed \$2,000).

Subsidies. Federal and State adoption subsidies (or adoption assistance) may be available to help adoptive parents pay for the ongoing care of children with special physical, mental, or emotional needs. In addition, some children qualify for SSI or Medicaid coverage. The Information Gateway factsheet *Adoption Assistance for*

Children Adopted From Foster Care provides more information on this topic:

www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_subsid.cfm

Employer Benefits

Many employers provide a range of benefits for families that adopt, such as paid or unpaid leave when a child arrives in the home, reimbursement of some portion of adoption expenses, and assistance with adoption services. (Corporate human resource departments can provide employees with benefit information.) The Information Gateway factsheet *Employer-Provided Adoption Benefits* provides more information on this topic:

www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_benefi.cfm

Adoption Loans and Grants

Adoptive parents are sometimes eligible for a loan or a grant to offset some of their adoption costs. Such programs have specific requirements for types of adoption and may give preference to families with the greatest financial need or those with other specific factors. Some adoption agencies may also have grant programs. More detailed information may be found by checking the resources listed below.

Additional Resources

Child Welfare Information Gateway offers factsheets that pertain to adoption costs:

- *Employer-Provided Adoption Benefits*
www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_benefi.cfm

⁴ Check your State tax law for the latest information.

- *Adoption Assistance for Children Adopted From Foster Care*
www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_subsid.cfm

National Adoption Foundation offers an adoption grant, loan programs, and adoption insurance:
www.nafadopt.org

National Endowment for Financial Education offers an online booklet on adoption costs: “How to Make Adoption an Affordable Option”
www.pueblo.gsa.gov/cic_text/family/adoption

North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC) lists State adoption subsidy profiles:
www.nacac.org/adoptionssubsidy/stateprofiles.html

NACAC also provides information on tax credits for special needs adoption:
www.nacac.org/postadopt/taxcredit.html

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pubs/sp_subsid.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/sp_subsid.cfm)

Adoption Assistance for Children Adopted From Foster Care



In every State, children with special needs are waiting in foster care for adoptive families. The most recent data suggest that an estimated 115,000 children are available to be adopted from foster care.¹ In the past, the costs of care and services were major obstacles to parents who would

¹ This figure is from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data for 2009. See www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/tar/report17.htm

What's Inside:

- Federal Title IV-E Adoption Assistance
- State adoption assistance
- Arranging adoption assistance

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otherwise adopt and be suitable parents for children from foster care, and many foster children were not placed for adoption due to this barrier.

The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980² provided the first Federal subsidies to encourage the adoption of children from the nation's foster care system. These subsidies, known as adoption assistance, serve to minimize the financial obstacles to adoption. In addition, other types of assistance often are available to help with medical care or other services. Adoption assistance serves to remove barriers and contribute to an increase in adoption of children with special needs.

Federal Title IV-E Adoption Assistance

Adoption assistance from the Federal Government is administered under the Federal Title IV-E Adoption Assistance Program. Payments to the adoptive parents of an eligible child with special needs can take two forms:

- One-time (nonrecurring) adoption assistance and/or
- Ongoing (recurring) adoption assistance

These funds may be available through State and private agencies for eligible children being adopted from foster care.

² See Information Gateway's website for more information on this Act: www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/federal/index.cfm?event=federalLegislation.viewLegis&id=22

The term "special needs" has a broad meaning in adoption. To learn more, read Information Gateway's "*Special Needs*" Adoption: What Does It Mean? at www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/specialneeds

Eligibility for Federal IV-E Adoption Assistance

With the passage of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, States and Tribes are required to have two sets of program eligibility criteria for the Title IV-E Adoption Assistance Program. One set of criteria applies to a child who is considered an "applicable child" due to the child's age, length of time in care, or as a sibling of an applicable child. The other criteria are for a child who is considered "not an applicable child" and who, in order to receive Title IV-E Adoption Assistance, must meet the former eligibility requirements.³ The criteria for a child who is not an applicable child will be phased out by 2018. At that point, all children will be considered "applicable."

It is important to understand that figuring out whether or not a child is an applicable or not an applicable child is only the first step to determining whether the child is eligible for title IV-E adoption assistance. Being an applicable child does not mean that a child automatically is eligible for Title IV-E Adoption Assistance.

³ Former eligibility requirements are available in the online *Child Welfare Policy Manual* at www.acf.hhs.gov/cwpm/programs/cb/laws_policies/laws/cwpm/policy_dsp.jsp?citID=32

The title IV-E agency will examine many factors when determining whether a child is eligible to receive Federal adoption assistance. The information below provides an overview of the eligibility criteria for the Federal adoption assistance program. The title IV-E agency can explain the eligibility details. The factors the title IV-E agency will consider include:

1. Whether the child is considered to be an “applicable child” whose eligibility is determined by the revised eligibility criteria, or whether the child is considered to be “not an applicable child” whose eligibility is determined based on the eligibility rules that were in place prior to October 1, 2009
2. Whether the child meets the title IV-E agency’s criteria for special needs
3. Whether the child meets specific eligibility criteria that provide the child a “pathway” into the adoption assistance program. Depending on several factors, the title IV-E agency *may* examine any of the following:
 - a. The legal and financial circumstances under which the child was removed from home
 - b. The manner of removal from the child’s home
 - c. Whether the child is a child of a minor parent who is in title IV-E foster care
 - d. Whether the child was eligible for Title IV-E Adoption Assistance in a prior adoption
 - e. Whether the child meets some or all of the criteria to receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI), which is a program administered by the Social Security Administration
4. Whether the child meets certain citizenship and immigration status requirements
5. Whether the prospective adoptive parents have passed a Federal criminal records check

State Adoption Assistance

State adoption assistance programs provide assistance for children with special needs who are not eligible under the Federal IV-E adoption assistance program. This assistance is funded by State and/or county dollars and is designed for children who are neither TANF- nor SSI-eligible prior to adoption.⁴ Eligibility criteria for these programs vary by State, but State adoption assistance programs generally fall into three categories:

Medical assistance covers some or all of the costs related to a child’s specific medical condition that are not covered by the family’s health insurance, as well as associated therapy, rehabilitation, and special education. (Most States call this type of assistance Medicaid.)

Direct payment assistance refers to direct payments to the adoptive family in order to help meet the special physical, mental, or emotional needs of the child.

⁴ Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) replaced Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC).

Supplemental adoption assistance varies greatly by State. Some States cover a child's emergency or extraordinary need; less often, assistance consists of repeated payments for services not covered by the medical or direct payments. Each State determines what is an allowable cost. Some States make this available for months, others for 6 months, while still others provide one-time coverage for a specific service.

Information Gateway's website can help you find adoption assistance by State through its annually updated database:

www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adopt_assistance

Eligibility for State Adoption Assistance and Other Assistance

States sometimes consider the prospective adoptive family's income and resources to determine if the family meets State eligibility requirements, which vary but are linked to:

- Determination of special needs from the Federal adoption assistance law
- Unique aspects of the State adoption assistance program

Arranging Adoption Assistance

When a State agency has determined that an adoptive child has special needs (as defined by that State), the possibility of adoption assistance is discussed with the prospective adoptive parents. States are responsible for

telling prospective adoptive parents about the availability of adoption assistance and eligibility for an adoption tax credit.⁵ Most children registered with agencies as having special needs have already been classified as eligible for adoption assistance.

Once a petition for adoption has been filed, the State makes a final determination of the child's eligibility under title IV-E or the State program. The family applies for the adoption assistance to the State agency through the local office. If approved, an adoption assistance agreement is drawn up between the public agency and the prospective parents, specifying the types of adoption assistance to be provided. This is usually done around the time of placement and *must* be done before finalization of the adoption. Each State has its own regulations for arranging a State-only subsidy, and each State establishes its own procedures to achieve compliance with the Federal title IV-E program in arranging this type of assistance.

Deferred Adoption Assistance

In some States, it is possible for adoptive parents to defer adoption assistance until it is needed to meet the needs of the adopted child. In these cases, parents can elect to receive a Medicaid card only and sign the agreement with the payment level of \$0, which can be raised to meet the needs of the child at a future date if needed. The adoption assistance agreement between the parents and the public agency is written to clearly identify what event(s) would trigger services. For example, a young child with

⁵ Read more about the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008: www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/implementation_foster.htm

a history of abuse and neglect or prenatal substance exposure may not need services at the time of adoption; however, an assistance agreement may be written to allow for services (with documentation from required professionals) if and when significant issues arise and the child needs intensive therapy or perhaps even residential care during the school-age or adolescent years.

Often, psychiatric reports and other documentation are necessary to justify the potential need for a future subsidy.

Appealing an Adoption Assistance Decision

Adoptive parents may appeal the State agency's decision regarding adoption assistance or the adoption assistance amount by using the State's fair hearing and appeals process. If the family is appealing a decision regarding a title IV-E subsidy, the family files an appeal through the local agency that administers title IV-E assistance. The local agency must inform the family about steps in the State fair hearing process. During the process, some families choose to hire an attorney or seek the advice of advocacy organizations for children with special needs. If a family wishes to appeal a decision regarding State adoption assistance, the family may consult with the local agency adoption assistance representative about the steps in the State appeals (or "fair hearing") process. Find more information about the fair hearing process on the Information Gateway website: www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adopt_assistance/questions.cfm?quest_id=10

Conclusion

Adoption assistance exists to help parents afford the costs associated with raising a child adopted from foster care. By providing financial assistance to these families, the State and Federal subsidy programs minimize the financial barriers to adopting a child from foster care so that more children in care are placed in permanent homes and families.

Adoption assistance payments are not the only type of financial assistance available to adoptive parents. Prospective adoptive parents should explore all potential resources to help make adoption an affordable option.

Information Gateway offers several factsheets that provide this type of information. For example:

- Information on finding out about tax benefits and reimbursement for one-time adoption costs is in *Costs of Adopting*: www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/s_cost/index.cfm
- Information on employer benefits is in *Employer-Provided Adoption Benefits*: www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_benefi.cfm

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Employer-Provided Adoption Benefits



A growing number of employers offer benefits to adoptive parents. In 1990, a survey by Hewitt Associates found that only 12 percent of employers surveyed offered some kind of adoption benefits; by 2004, a Hewitt survey of 936 major U.S. employers showed that the percentage had grown to 39 percent, with an average maximum reimbursement of \$3,879 for adoption expenses.

What's Inside:

- Types of benefits
- Eligibility and conditions
- Employers that offer adoption benefits

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In Hewitt's most recent survey report (2008-2009), more than half of the 940 large employers surveyed said that they offer some type of adoption assistance.¹ Employers that offer adoption benefits cite advantages for their companies including maintenance of productivity, retention of good employees, a positive public image, and equity in benefits for all employees.

Employer-sponsored adoption benefits take many forms. This factsheet examines:

- What types of benefits do employers offer to help with adoption?
- What are the eligibility criteria and conditions for receiving adoption benefits?
- Which employers offer adoption benefits?

Child Welfare Information Gateway provides additional factsheets and other information about making adoption affordable.

- *Costs of Adopting* (www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/s_cost/index.cfm)
- *Adoption Assistance for Children Adopted From Foster Care* (www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_subsid.cfm)

¹ "Trends in HR and Employee Benefits: Employer-Provided Adoption Benefits." November 2009. www.hewittassociates.com/_MetaBasicCMAAssetCache_/Assets/Articles/2009/Employer-Provided_Adoption_Benefits.pdf

Types of Benefits

Typically, adoption benefits mirror benefits available to new biological parents. Adoption benefits fall into three general categories:

- Information resources
- Financial assistance
- Parental leave policies

Employers may offer one or more of these types of benefits for a single adoption.

Information Resources

Resources made available to employees may include referrals to licensed adoption agencies, support groups, and organizations; access to an adoption specialist to answer questions about the process; and/or help with special situations, such as adopting a child with special needs. Many employers that offer this type of benefit contract with a human resources consulting firm to provide these services to employees.

Financial Assistance

Financial benefits for adoptive families vary. Some employers provide a lump sum payment for an adoption, usually between \$1,000 and \$15,000. Other employers pay certain fees related to an adoption. Still others partially reimburse employees for expenses. Typical reimbursement plans cover 80 percent of certain itemized expenses up to an established ceiling (about \$4,000 on average). Some employers reimburse at a higher rate for adoptions

of children with special needs. Most frequently, employer-provided financial assistance covers public or private agency fees, court costs, and legal fees. Employers also might help with foreign adoption fees, medical costs, temporary foster care charges, transportation costs, pregnancy costs for a birth mother, and counseling fees associated with placement and transition.

Some employers pay benefits per adoption, while others pay per child adopted. In most cases, the benefits are paid after the adoption is finalized, although some employers may pay benefits when the child is placed or as the expenses are incurred.

Parental Leave Policies

In many cases, employers are required to grant parental leave to parents who have adopted a child. Federal law requires employers with 50 or more employees to offer both mothers and fathers up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave upon the birth or adoption of a child. The law ensures that employees can return to their current jobs or an equivalent position, and it requires employers to continue the employee's health benefits during the leave period. Information about this law, entitled the Family and Medical Leave Act, can be found at www.dol.gov/whd/fmla

Some employers allow employees to take more than the required 12 weeks of unpaid leave. Employees may be permitted to combine accumulated paid leave (such as vacation or sick leave) with unpaid leave to extend their total leave. Some employers even offer paid leave for employees who adopt a child. Certain employers may be bound by public and private union

contracts that have provisions for adoption leave.

In addition to the Federal law, many States require employers to offer parental leave to adoptive parents. To find out about a particular State, check your State's adoption policy handbook or contact the State's adoption program manager. Information Gateway's online National Foster Care and Adoption Directory lists contact information for each State's adoption program manager: www.childwelfare.gov/nfcad

Eligibility and Conditions

Eligibility for adoption benefits usually depends on employment status (for example, policies frequently specify that full-time employees are eligible while temporary employees are not). Employers also might tie eligibility to length of employment or participation in a company-sponsored health plan.

The type of adoption also can affect the benefits offered. For example, some employers do not provide benefits when a stepparent adopts his or her stepchild or stepchildren. Some employers specify that the child being adopted cannot be older than 16 or 18 years. Others offer enhanced benefits for the adoption of a child with special needs.

Employers That Offer Adoption Benefits

Many employers offer some form of adoption benefits. To find out if your company offers adoption benefits, ask your human resource or personnel department.

Wendy's International sponsors the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and its Adoption-Friendly Workplace program, which encourages employers to offer adoption benefits and celebrates those who do. Its website includes:

- Lists of employers that offer adoption benefits such as financial reimbursement and paid leave for adoption
- An annual list of the nation's "100 Best Adoption-Friendly Workplaces"
- A free toolkit and technical assistance for companies wishing to propose or establish an adoption benefits policy

To order a free toolkit or learn more, visit the website:

www.AdoptionFriendlyWorkplace.org

The Holt International website includes an extensive list of employers that provide benefits that range from financial assistance to granting employees parental leave:

www.holtinternational.org/adoption/benefits.shtml

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