THE 2026 ICHRA REPORT

How Employers and Benefits Consultants View ICHRA Today: 5 Key Insights

Year-over-year trends in awareness, satisfaction, and opportunity in a shifting benefits landscape

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A letter from the CEO of zizzl health

As the healthcare benefits market continues to evolve, zizzl health remains committed to helping organizations navigate change with data-driven clarity. In partnership with Deft Research, we are proud to present our second annual research study on how Individual Coverage Health Reimbursement Arrangements (ICHRAs) are perceived by both employers and benefits consultants.

Last year's inaugural study established the first comprehensive benchmarks around ICHRA awareness, satisfaction, and adoption. This year, we've measured how those benchmarks have shifted. The 2026 study tracks year-over-year changes across every key dimension, giving the industry its first look at how perceptions of ICHRA are evolving over time.

The results are encouraging. Employer awareness and confidence have increased meaningfully. Satisfaction with ICHRA has held steady despite a challenging open enrollment period. And benefits consultants continue to recognize ICHRA as an increasingly important part of the benefits landscape.

We hope this report helps you better understand the dynamics of the ICHRA market—and inspires informed conversations around its potential to manage costs, improve employee satisfaction, and drive business growth.

Ray Seaver
CEO, zizzl health

Understanding Employer and Consultant Perspectives on ICHRA:

Insights from the Second Annual Study

The 2026 ICHRA Report explores how employers and benefits consultants perceive Individual Coverage Health Reimbursement Arrangements (ICHRAs)—and how those perceptions have changed since our inaugural study in 2025.

This second annual study is the result of a joint effort between zizzl health and Deft Research, and captures perspectives from both sides of the ICHRA equation. With 643 total respondents from the primary study (413 employers and 230 benefits consultants), the research tracks year-over-year changes across three key areas:

- **ICHRA awareness, familiarity, and confidence** among employers and benefits consultants.
- **Satisfaction with ICHRA** among employers and consultants, and employers' perceptions of employee satisfaction.
- **Shifts in ICHRA perception and adoption** that reveal opportunities and best practices for benefits consultants to educate and support clients around ICHRA.

The results reveal a market that has matured meaningfully in one year—characterized by growing employer confidence, steady satisfaction through market headwinds, and a distinct advantage for benefits consultants who proactively engage with ICHRA. Looking beyond the data to identify key takeaways to guide future action, this second annual study reveals that:

1. **Employer awareness, familiarity, and confidence in ICHRA are accelerating.** Awareness jumped from 54% to 79%, familiarity from 50% to 75%, and confidence improved across every dimension measured.
2. **ICHRA satisfaction held steady through a turbulent market**—despite 20%+ premium increases in the individual market driven by unique circumstances in the ACA market.
3. **Satisfaction with ICHRA deepens over time.** Employers who have offered ICHRA for four or more years rate their satisfaction as high as—or higher than—those offering traditional group coverage.
4. **Benefits consultants who engage with ICHRA strengthen client relationships,** and those who don't risk losing them. 20% of employers switching to ICHRA bring in a new consultant to make it happen.
5. **ICHRA adoption momentum continues to build**; benefits consultants who don't engage with ICHRA risk being left behind. The share who say they'll "never" sell ICHRA dropped from 22% to 8%, while employers highly likely to offer it grew from 24% to 39%.

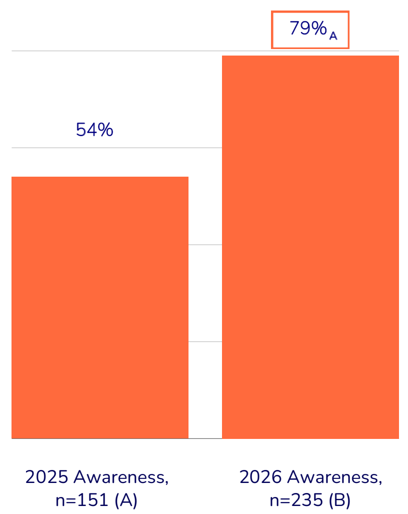
By surfacing year-over-year shifts and emerging trends, this research offers an evolving roadmap for benefits consultants and vendors looking to better serve employers seeking more affordable, personalized health coverage for their workforce.

ICHRA AWARENESS, FAMILIARITY, AND CONFIDENCE

Our 2025 research revealed a significant awareness gap among employers: 46% of employers not offering ICHRA had never heard of it, and only 27% of those who were aware learned about it from their current benefits consultant. One year later, that gap is narrowing.

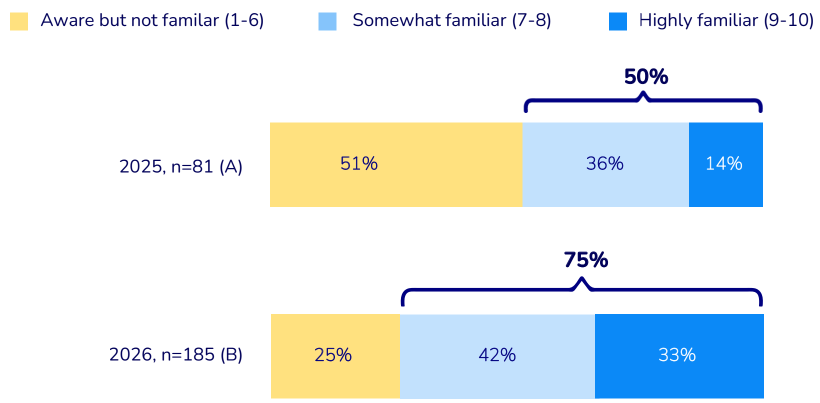
Among employers not currently offering ICHRA, both awareness and familiarity increased by 25 percentage points in the last year. As awareness and familiarity with ICHRA continue to grow, employers may be more likely to view it as a mainstream employee benefits option instead of an experimental offering.

AWARENESS OF ICHRA TREND



Base: Gen Pop Employers, Not Currently Offering ICHRA

FAMILIARITY WITH ICHRA

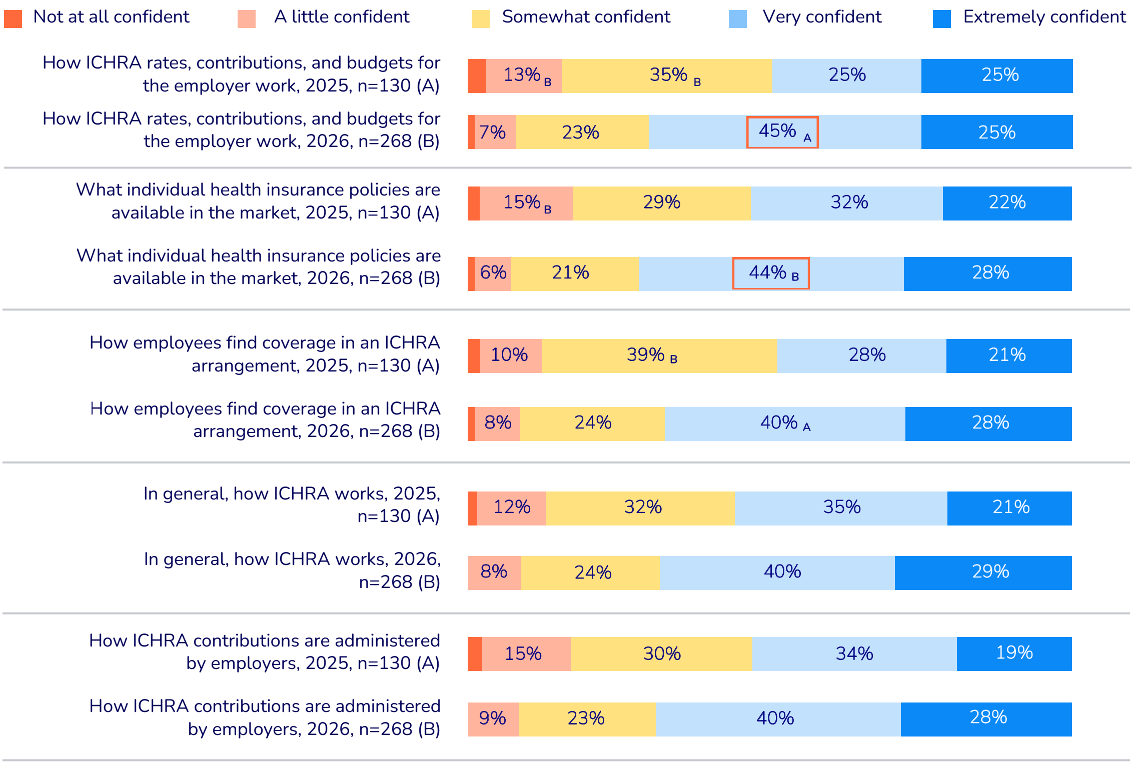


Base: Gen Pop Employers, Not Currently Offering ICHRA but Aware

Employers with fewer than 50 full-time employees are less likely to be aware of ICHRA and have lower rates of familiarity. Awareness is highest among mid-market employers (50–500 employees), though large employers (500+) are increasingly entering the conversation and are more likely than smaller employers to have first heard about ICHRA from their benefits consultant. Smaller employers represent a strong opportunity for benefits consultants looking to grow their book of business. Introducing smaller employers to ICHRA and assessing their suitability for it can serve as a foundation for building trust, regardless of whether an employer decides to continue with traditional group or move to ICHRA.

Employer confidence in understanding the mechanics of ICHRA has also improved. The share of employers reporting low confidence in their understanding of ICHRA decreased by nearly half compared to last year. As employers who do not offer ICHRA grow more comfortable with all aspects of the strategy, they are more likely to proactively discuss it with their benefits consultant. Benefits consultants who lack a strong understanding of ICHRA, along with its advantages and drawbacks, will increasingly come under pressure from their clients or risk losing them to competitors.

CONFIDENCE IN UNDERSTANDING ASPECTS OF ICHRA BY YEAR



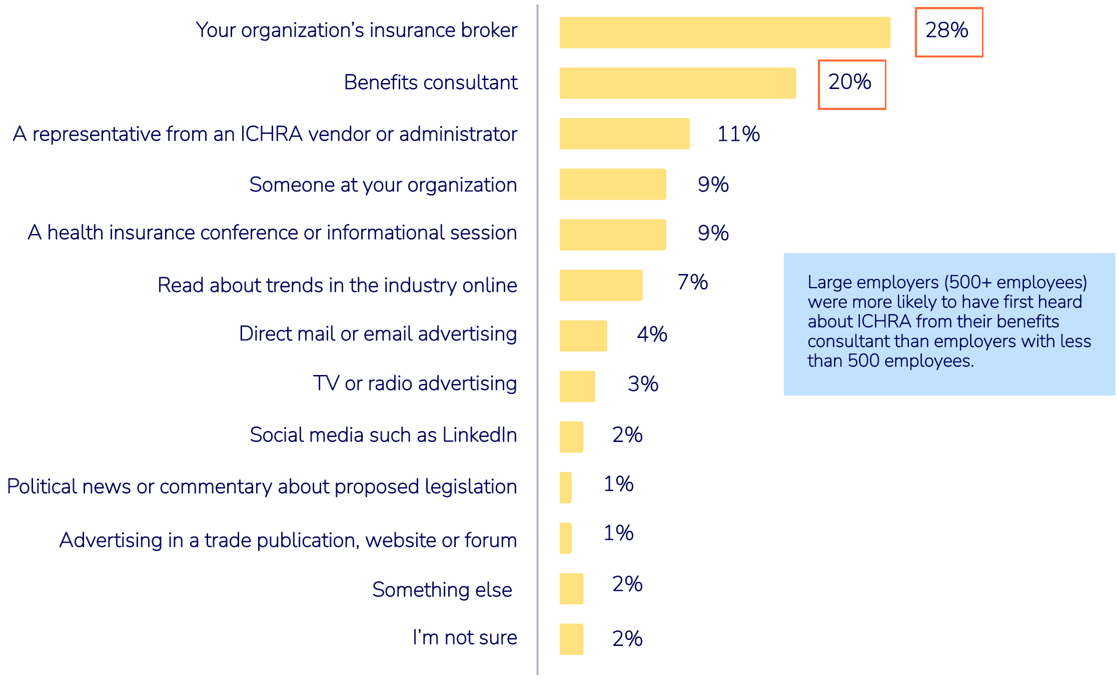
Base: Gen Pop Employers, Aware of ICHRA

Benefits consultants remain the single largest source of employers' first introduction to ICHRA, accounting for about half of all first touchpoints. However, more than 50% of employers still learn about ICHRA from someone other than a benefits consultant, and more than 70% learn about it from someone other than their own consultant. ICHRA vendors and administrators remain the resource most employers would seek out for additional information.

ICHRA AWARENESS, FAMILIARITY, AND CONFIDENCE

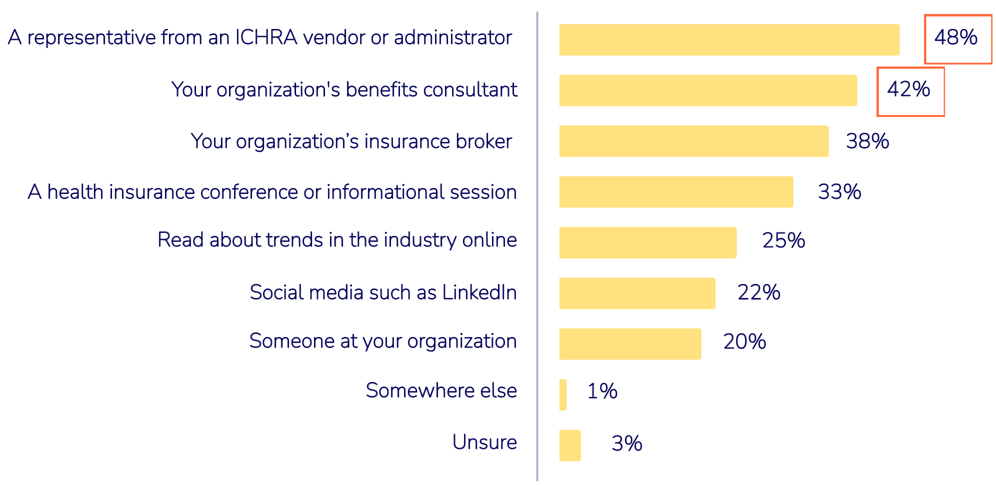
Employers are increasingly open to learning about ICHRA—especially when proactive education is provided. If benefits consultants don't fill that gap, vendors marketing directly to employers will.

WHERE EMPLOYERS FIRST LEARNED ABOUT ICHRA



Base: Aware of ICHRA or zizzl Client, n=280

WHERE EMPLOYERS WOULD GO TO LEARN MORE ABOUT ICHRA

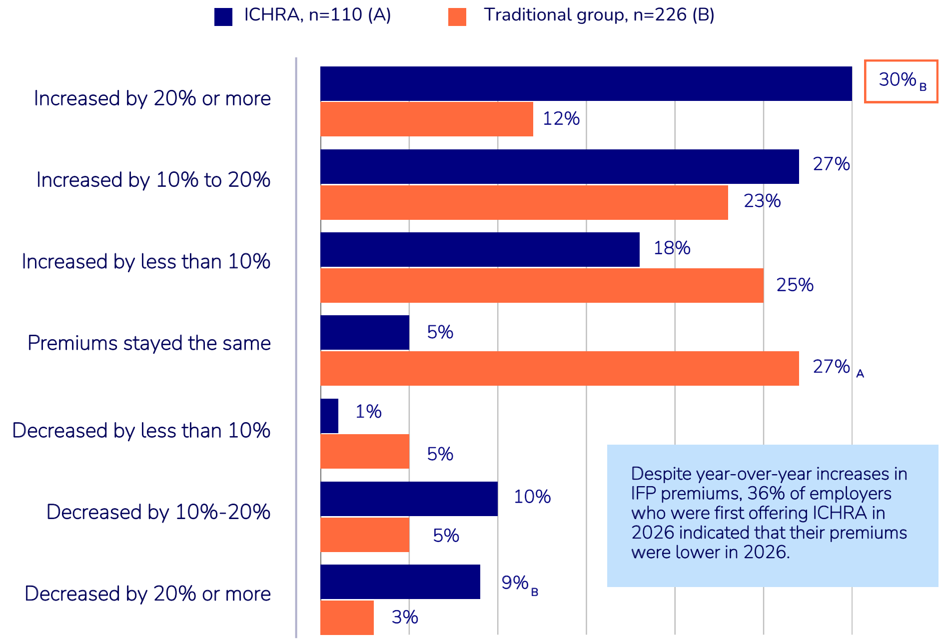


Base: Gen Pop Employers, n=318; Multiple Response

SATISFACTION WITH ICHRA

The 2025–2026 open enrollment period presented unique challenges for the individual market. Average on-exchange premiums nationally increased by approximately 25%, influenced by government shutdown timing, subsidy reform uncertainty, and broader ACA market disruption. Given these broader market conditions, it's not surprising that employers offering ICHRA were nearly three times more likely than those offering traditional group coverage to report a 20% or greater premium increase.

PERCENT PREMIUM CHANGE FROM PREVIOUS YEAR BY HEALTH INSURANCE OFFERED

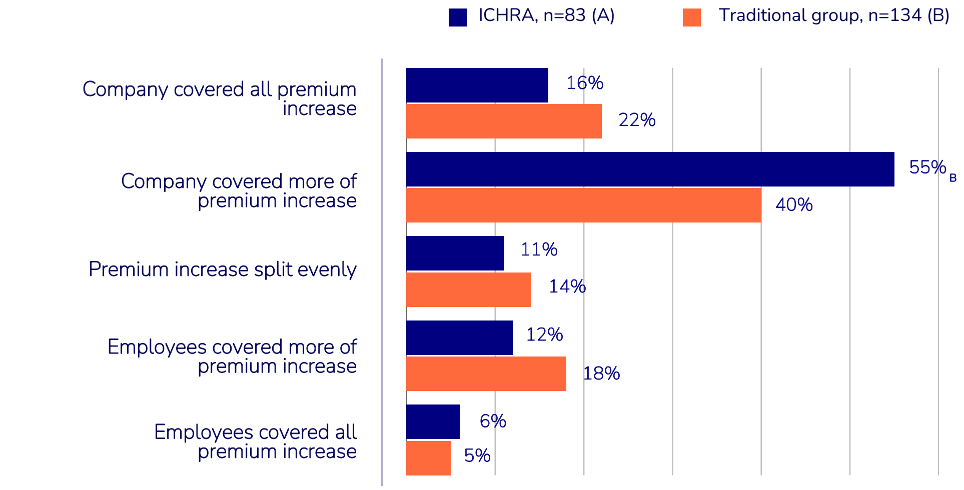


Base: Offers Only ICHRA or Traditional Group, Knows Average Premium Change

However, these increases should be viewed in context. With annualized average rate increases in the individual market running at 1–2% between 2018 and 2025[1], the 2025–2026 increases appear to be driven by circumstances unique to the ACA market rather than a sign of higher future rate changes. Notably, 36% of employers who first offered ICHRA in 2026 indicated that their premiums were lower than what they had been paying for traditional group coverage.

Regardless of coverage type, employers generally covered a larger portion of premium increases than they passed on to employees. This suggests that employers understand the importance of keeping health insurance affordable for their workforce. While ICHRA allows employers to set contributions according to their budget, most continue to prioritize employee affordability.

WHO PAID FOR PREMIUM INCREASE

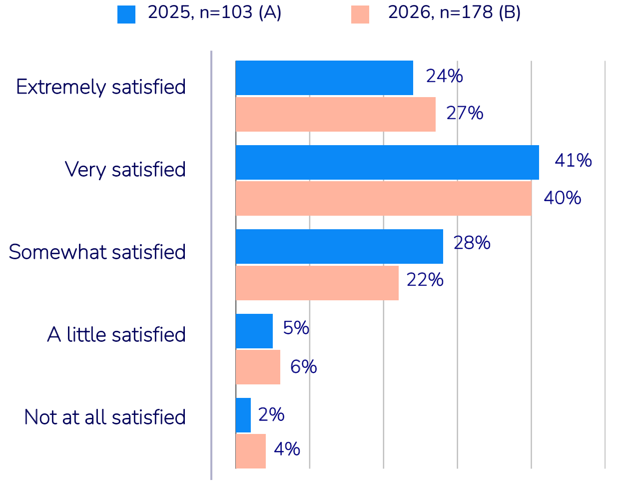


Employers covered the majority of any premium increases at a similar rate no matter their size or the type of insurance they offer to their employees. Only employers with 50-199 employers came close to one-fifth having passed on some or much of the premium increases to their employees. This suggests that employers understand the importance of the insurance benefit and do everything in their power to keep it affordable for their employees.

Base: Offers Only ICHRA or Traditional Group Insurance, Premium Increased

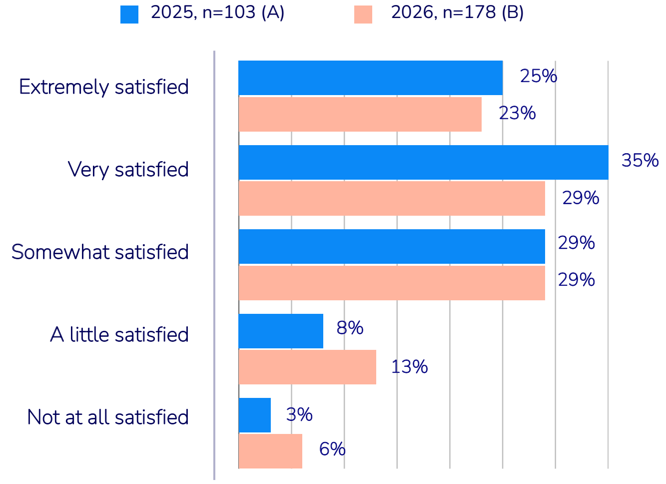
Despite higher premium increases, overall employer satisfaction with ICHRA did not differ from last year. Both employer satisfaction and employers' perceptions of employee satisfaction remained stable—suggesting that the ICHRA market is able to withstand temporary setbacks as it grows.

EMPLOYERS' SATISFACTION WITH ICHRA BY YEAR



Base: Gen Pop Employers and zizzl Clients Offering ICHRA

EMPLOYERS' PERCEPTIONS OF EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION WITH ICHRA BY YEAR

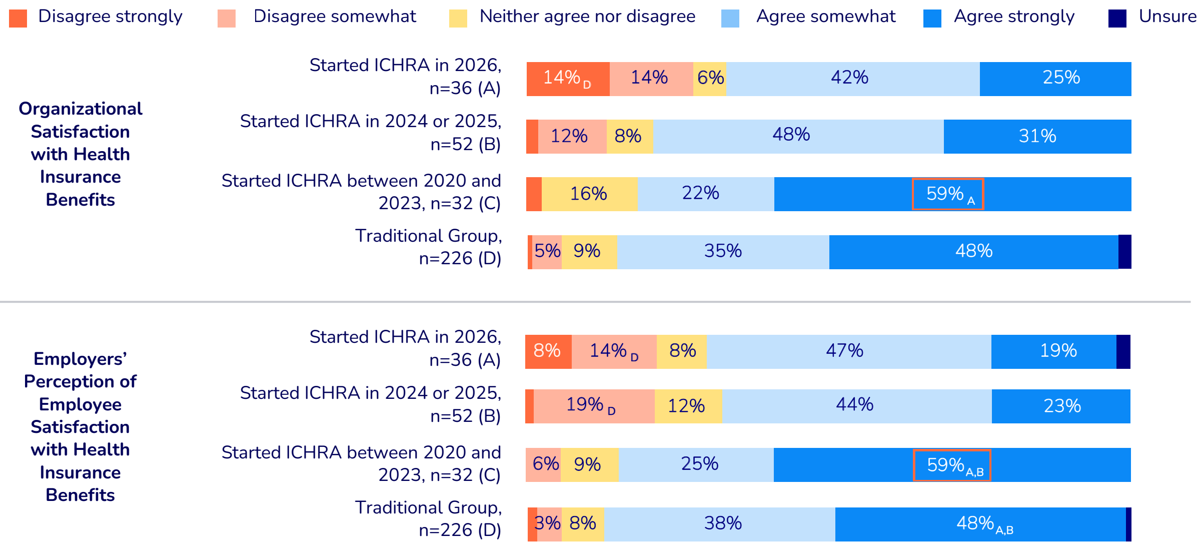


Base: Gen Pop Employers and zizzl Clients Offering ICHRA

[1]Deft Research, 2026 Individual and Family Plan Shopping and Switching Study.

One of the most significant findings in this year's study is the relationship between ICHRA tenure and satisfaction. Employers offering ICHRA for four years or more rate their satisfaction with their health insurance benefits about as highly—perhaps even higher than—those offering traditional group.

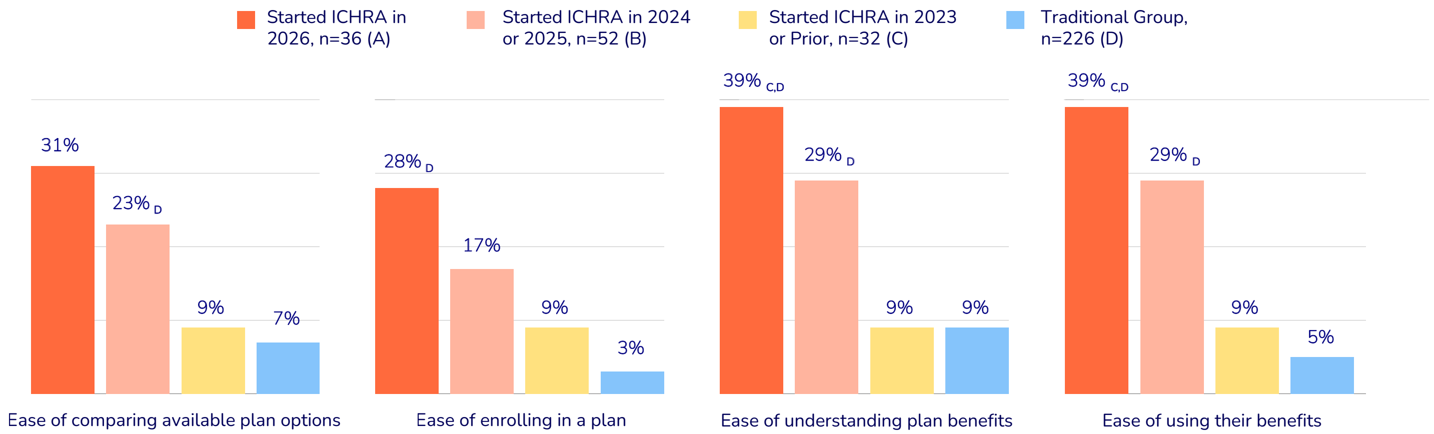
AGREEMENT ABOUT SATISFACTION WITH HEALTH INSURANCE BENEFITS BY ICHRA TENURE VS. TRADITIONAL GROUP



Base: Offers Only ICHRA or Traditional Group

ICHRA may have a steep learning curve, with about one-third of employers offering ICHRA for three years or less indicating that employees have difficulties navigating their coverage. However, employers who have offered ICHRA since 2023 or earlier and those offering traditional group coverage both report low rates of employee coverage difficulties.

PERCENT OF EMPLOYERS INDICATING THAT EMPLOYEES' HAVE DIFFICULTY WITH COVERAGE AREA BY ICHRA TENURE VS. TRADITIONAL GROUP



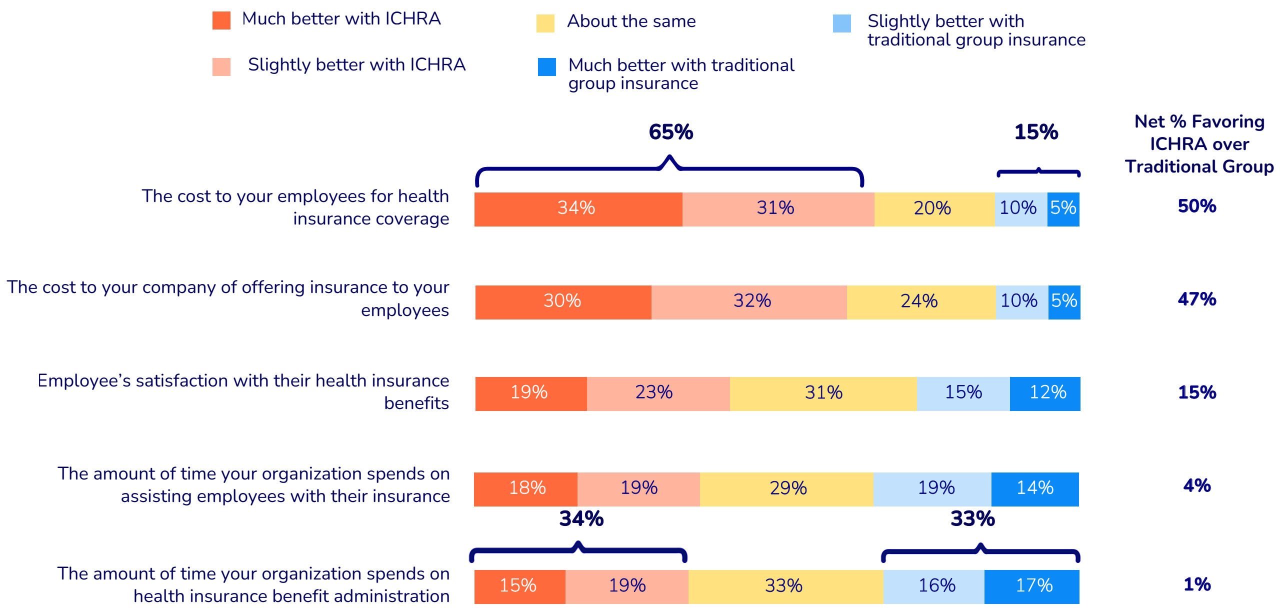
Base: Offers Only ICHRA or Traditional Group

Additionally, employers who have implemented ICHRA report that:

- The biggest challenge is educating employees—not the benefit itself.
- Over time, employee difficulties with navigating coverage normalize to levels comparable to traditional group.
- Benefits consultants who discuss both ICHRA and traditional strategies are rated more favorably.

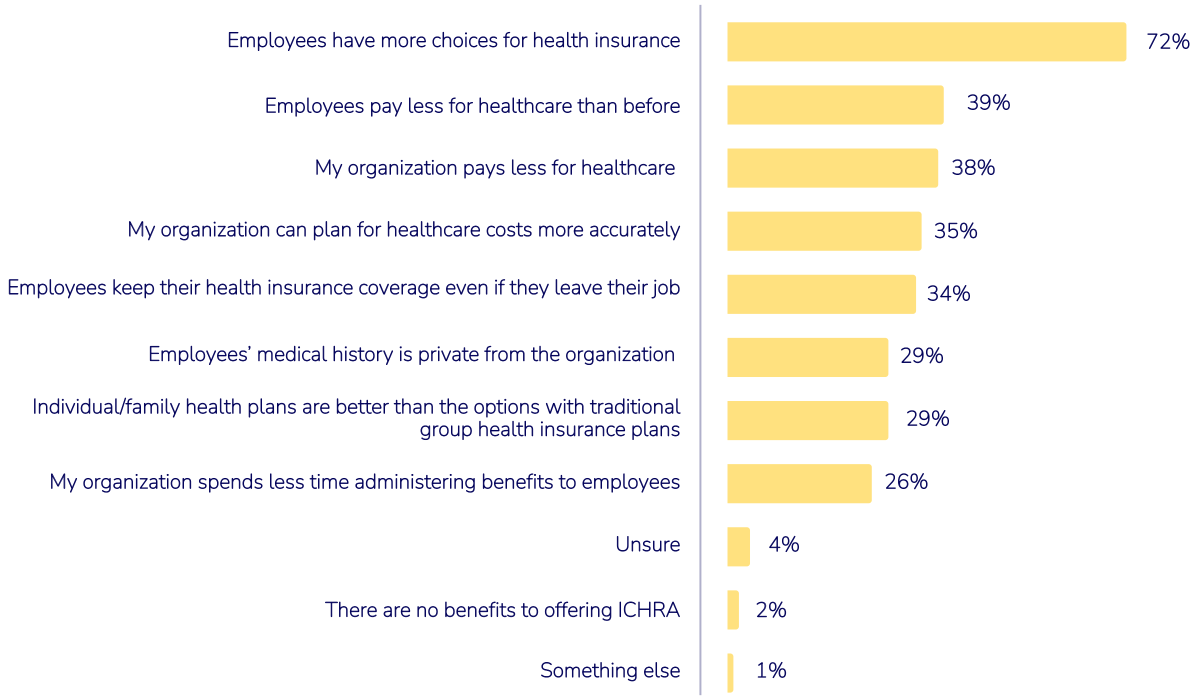
When employers who have offered both ICHRA and traditional group compare the two directly, the results are striking. 65% recognize ICHRA's cost advantages for their organization, and 50% say it's better for employees too. Employee choice remains the top perceived benefit of ICHRA, but the cost story is hard to ignore.

COMPARISON OF ICHRA EXPERIENCES COMPARED TO FORMER GROUP COVERAGE



Base: Offers ICHRA, Offered Group Prior to ICHRA, n=145

BENEFITS OF ICHRA



Base: Gen Pop Employers and zizzl Clients Offering ICHRA, n=178
Multiple Response

Network access remains the most frequently cited concern among both employers considering ICHRA and those already offering it. In some cases, employers' concerns about network access may be warranted, but perception and limited access to quality provider data are often a bigger factor than actual provider gaps. Benefits consultants should be aware of which carriers cover major health systems within their area and whether any systems are unavailable through individual/family plan coverage.

TRENDS IN ICHRA PERCEPTION AND ADOPTION

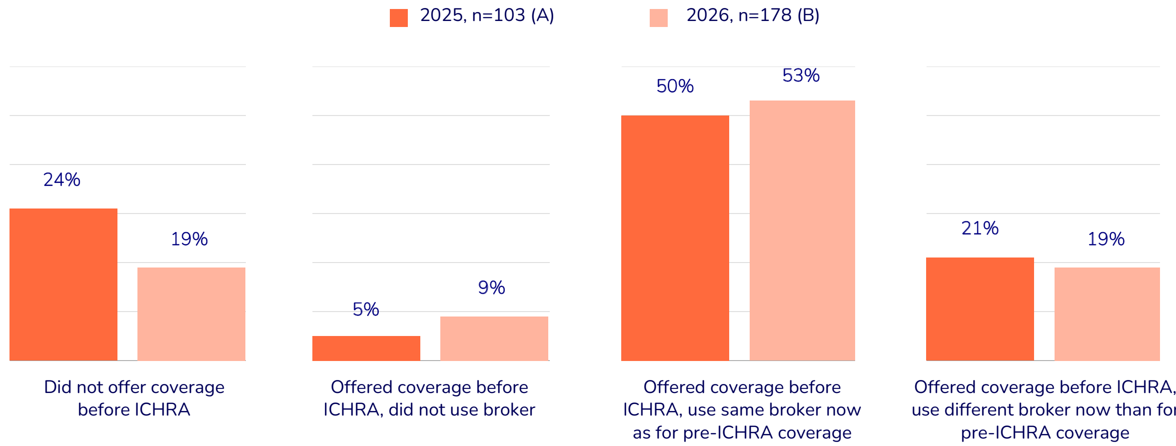
Change is hard. And yes, ICHRA adoption has taken time. But the pace is picking up:

- 39% of employers considering ICHRA are now highly likely to offer it in the future—up from 24% last year.
- Benefits consultants have continued to discuss, recommend, and sell ICHRA at similar rates compared to last year despite challenges in the ACA market.
- The share of benefits consultants who say they will never sell ICHRA dropped from 22% to 8%, suggesting that even former skeptics are now putting ICHRA in their toolkit.

Three-fifths of employers offering traditional group coverage use a benefits consultant in plan selection, a small increase from last year. Employers were almost three times as likely to be extremely satisfied with their benefits consultant in 2026 compared to 2025.

However, about 20% of employers who transitioned to ICHRA did so with the help of a new benefits consultant—not their existing one. This figure has held steady for two years, suggesting that ICHRA adoption continues to be a moment when employers may reconsider their consulting relationships. Benefits consultants who can't accommodate ICHRA risk losing clients at the moment those clients are making a major benefits decision.

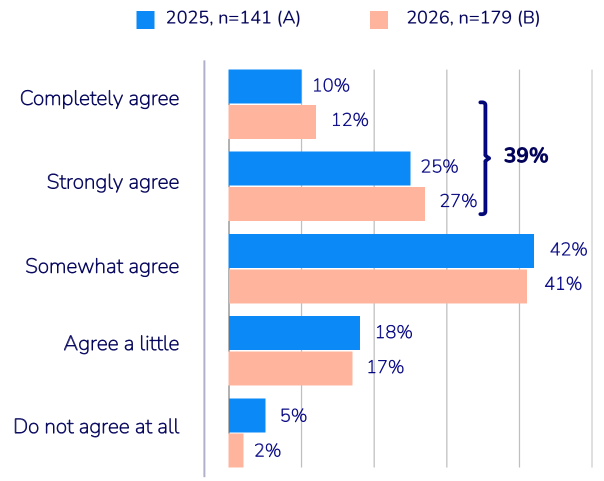
PRE-ICHRA EMPLOYER HEALTH INSURANCE OFFERING AND BROKER USE STATUS



Base: Offers Only ICHRA or Traditional Group

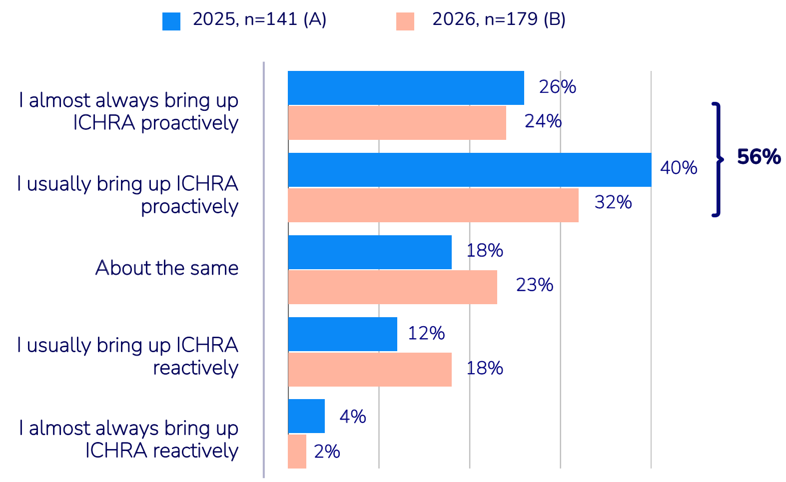
Despite well-publicized challenges with the ACA market heading into 2026, benefits consultants continued to discuss, recommend, and sell ICHRA at rates similar to last year. Almost 4 in 10 benefits consultants agree that ICHRA is an essential strategy for employers offering health insurance, a slight increase from 2025.

BROKERS' AGREEMENT THAT ICHRA "IS AN ESSENTIAL STRATEGY FOR EMPLOYERS OFFERING HEALTH INSURANCE"



Base: Brokers Selling ICHRA and Traditional Group

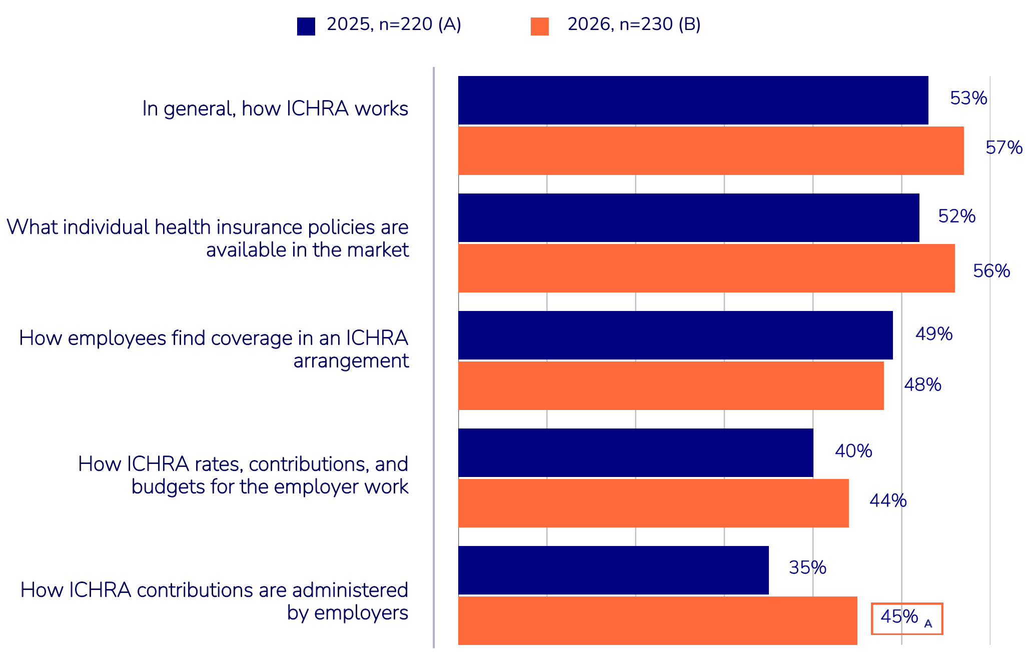
HOW OFTEN BROKERS BRING UP ICHRA PROACTIVELY VS. REACTIVELY



Base: Brokers Selling ICHRA and Traditional Group

There is a slightly higher level of comfort among benefits consultants regarding ICHRA than last year. However, consultants still need assistance when it comes to understanding the administration of ICHRA. Vendors can use this as an opportunity to create relationships with consultants to provide education and offer services to their clients.

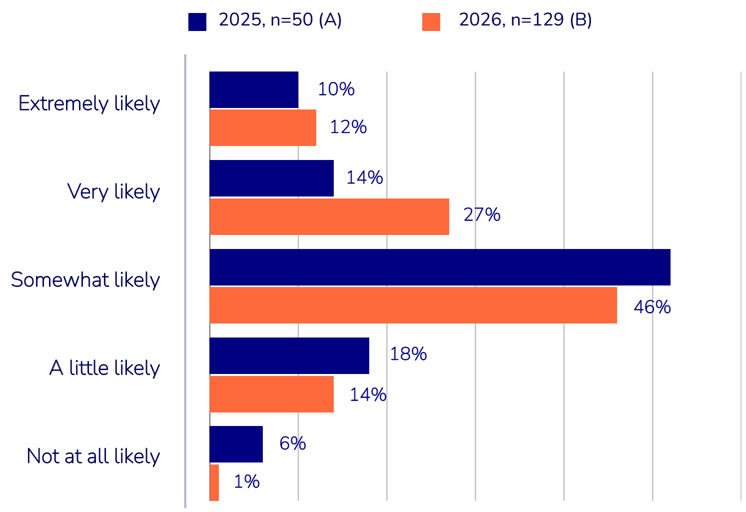
% BROKERS' HIGHLY COMFORTABLE WITH ASPECTS OF ICHRA



Base: All Brokers

Employer intent to offer ICHRA is growing. 39% of employers currently considering ICHRA indicated they are highly likely to offer it in the future, up from 24% last year. Despite well-publicized challenges in the individual market, employers continue to remain open to the possibility of shifting toward ICHRA. Employers currently using level funding are more likely to consider transitioning to ICHRA, suggesting that employers open to rethinking how they fund benefits may find ICHRA's potential for cost management appealing.

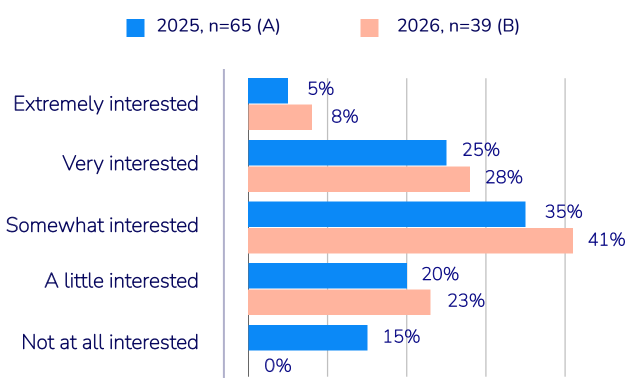
LIKELIHOOD OF ORGANIZATION TO OFFER ICHRA IN THE FUTURE BY YEAR



Base: Gen Pop Employers, Not Yet Offering ICHRA, but Considering

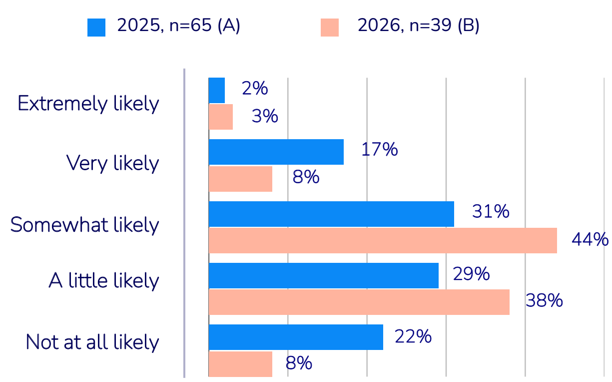
Among benefits consultants not currently selling ICHRA, interest in learning more remains steady. However, the share who say they will never sell ICHRA dropped significantly—from 22% to just 8%. These same consultants are much more likely to report having an interest in learning more about ICHRA, suggesting they may be taking a "wait and see" approach rather than dismissing the strategy outright.

BROKERS' INTEREST IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT ICHRA BY YEAR



Base: Brokers Not Currently Selling ICHRA

BROKERS' LIKELIHOOD TO START SELLING ICHRA IN THE NEXT TWO YEARS BY YEAR



Base: Brokers Not Currently Selling ICHRA

The bottom line: benefits consultants who don't engage with ICHRA as a strategic option risk losing clients to those who do. Meanwhile, employers ready to offer more choice and control are looking for guidance—and ICHRA-savvy benefits consultants are well positioned to deliver.

CONCLUSION

The Second Annual ICHRA Report confirms what many leaders in the benefits space have sensed: ICHRA continues to gain traction, and the market is maturing. Benefits consultants who embrace the model as an essential part of the benefits toolkit will be the ones driving innovation, satisfaction, and growth.

Our data shows that the ICHRA market is evolving, offering real opportunities for benefits consultants to lead the way. As the landscape continues to shift, this research affirms five insights as essential guideposts for stakeholders moving forward:

1. **Employer awareness, familiarity, and confidence are accelerating,** with awareness jumping from 54% to 79%, familiarity from 50% to 75%, and confidence improving across every dimension. Most employers haven't heard about ICHRA from their current benefits consultant—presenting a clear opportunity for consultants to step in and guide them through the process.
2. **ICHRA satisfaction held steady through a challenging market**. Despite premium increases driven by unique ACA market conditions, employers didn't leave ICHRA and satisfaction remained stable. The longer-term impacts will depend on whether these increases were a one-off event or a sign of structural change.
3. **Satisfaction with ICHRA deepens over time**. The early years involve a learning curve centered on change management and employee education. But by year four, ICHRA employers report satisfaction on par with—or exceeding—those offering traditional group plans.
4. **Benefits consultants who engage with ICHRA strengthen client relationships**. When benefits consultants proactively present ICHRA alongside traditional options, client satisfaction rises. Those who avoid ICHRA risk losing clients at the moment of transition—20% of employers switching to ICHRA bring in a new consultant.
5. **ICHRA adoption is growing**; benefits consultants who don't engage with ICHRA risk being left behind. The "never ICHRA" segment dropped from 22% to 8%, while employer intent to offer grew from 24% to 39%. The market is moving, and the window for early-mover advantage is beginning to close.

Together, these findings offer a roadmap for benefits consultants to add value, for employers to make informed decisions, and for the industry to continue progressing toward broader acceptance and smarter healthcare solutions.

For a deeper dive into the results, contact zizzl health at info@zizzlhealth.com and learn how to apply the insights into your client strategies. We're here to help you move from awareness to action.

ABOUT THE 2026 SECOND ANNUAL ICHRA STUDY

Deft Research conducted the 2026 Second Annual ICHRA Study through a series of online surveys administered from January 26 to February 21, 2026, using a national panel of verified respondents in decision-making roles related to employee benefits. The survey sample included a balanced representation of employer sizes and industries, as well as benefits consultants with clients ranging from small businesses to large enterprises, across three key stakeholder groups: zizzl health employer clients (95), an expanded sample of benefits decision-makers representing private employers (318), and insurance and benefits consultants (230). Survey participation was incentivized, with compensation varying by respondent group.

The research was designed to:

- Track year-over-year changes in ICHRA awareness, familiarity, and confidence among benefits consultants and employers.
- Explore the factors influencing employer consideration of ICHRA, including perceived benefits and challenges.
- Identify best practices for benefits consultants looking to maximize their success selling ICHRA.

While the study reflects a broad cross-section of perspectives, results may not fully represent all market segments. As a self-reported survey, responses are subject to personal interpretation and recall bias. However, the study provides critical directional insights into market attitudes and adoption trends that will be tracked annually moving forward.

This report summarizes select findings from the full dataset. Due to rounding, some percentages may not add up to 100%.

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ABOUT DEFT RESEARCH

Deft Research is the health insurance industry's most trusted source for consumer and market intelligence. The Deft team delivers forward-looking data and strategic insights that help health plans, providers, and benefits partners better serve their members and clients. Connect with them at **deftresearch.com**.

ABOUT ZIZZL HEALTH

zizzl health delivers a state-of-the-art ICHRA experience that empowers employers to offer high quality, affordable health insurance to employees nationwide. With smarter tools, intuitive technology, and real human support, zizzl health helps companies stay protected from unpredictable renewals while employees gain access to personalized coverage that matches their individual needs. Learn more at **zizzlhealth.com**.