



# 2019

# Aegis Risk Medical Stop-Loss Premium Survey

## Executive Summary

This year's survey, its thirteenth year, reflects the increasing role of medical stop-loss and a continued commitment to employer-sponsored, self-funded health plans. The occurrence of truly catastrophic claimants—in excess of \$1 million—is further verified with 31% of respondents reporting such a claimant in the last two policy years. Stop-loss remains the primary focus of risk management, with 71% of respondents sharing no interest in alternate approaches. Additional updates are provided on individual stop-loss deductible by employer size and other coverage provisions, including aggregate stop-loss. The primary focus of the survey remains current premium rates, as shown in the following graphs and tables. Stop-loss premium reflecting over 940,000 covered employees is measured.

## Average Stop-Loss Premium—It Varies

Stop-loss coverage among plan sponsors varies greatly—causing development of an average premium cost—a difficult, if not irrelevant, task. Each group has an individual stop-loss (ISL) deductible and contract type that varies from another—all with significant impact on premiums. Enrollment size and group demographics are other variables.

However, normalization of responses can be reasonably attained: Larger plans typically select higher ISL deductibles, and contract type can be accounted for by underwriting ratios. *For this survey, all contracts are equated to a mature "paid" contract.*

When plotted on a graph, a trend line can be drawn showing average premium cost by size of deductible for the continuum of coverage. Further variation may still exist due to PPO networks, pharmacy coverage and group demographics.

The survey's intent is to show policyholder total premium expense. Broker commissions are not removed. They are a frequent component of premium—and may be hidden, if not unknown, to respondents, including the correct manner to deduct. Those with excessive loads may observe it in their comparison to this survey.

## A Focus on Renewal Decisions and Policy Provisions

With the increased expense of stop-loss premium and the growing exposure to catastrophic risk, the stop-loss renewal decision often involves internal audiences beyond benefits and human resources. Finance and/or CFO continue to be predominantly involved at 59%. Excluding claimants at renewal, known as *lasering*, is not permitted per policy for 53% of respondents; but only 30% of those with a renewal rate cap. Altogether, this is an increase from 38% in 2018 with no permitted lasering. "Mirroring" of the stop-loss policy to underlying health plan language is reported by 45%. Dividend eligible policies are still uncommon at 6%.

### Which of these provisions (if any) are a component of your current stop-loss policy? (Check all that apply.)

	2018	2019
No new laser at renewal; no renewal rate increase cap	18%	23%
No new laser at renewal; with a renewal rate increase cap	20%	30%
"Plan mirroring" of stop-loss contract to underlying health plan language	42%	45%
Dividend eligible if favorable claims experience	11%	6%
None of the above	33%	20%
Do not know	13%	11%

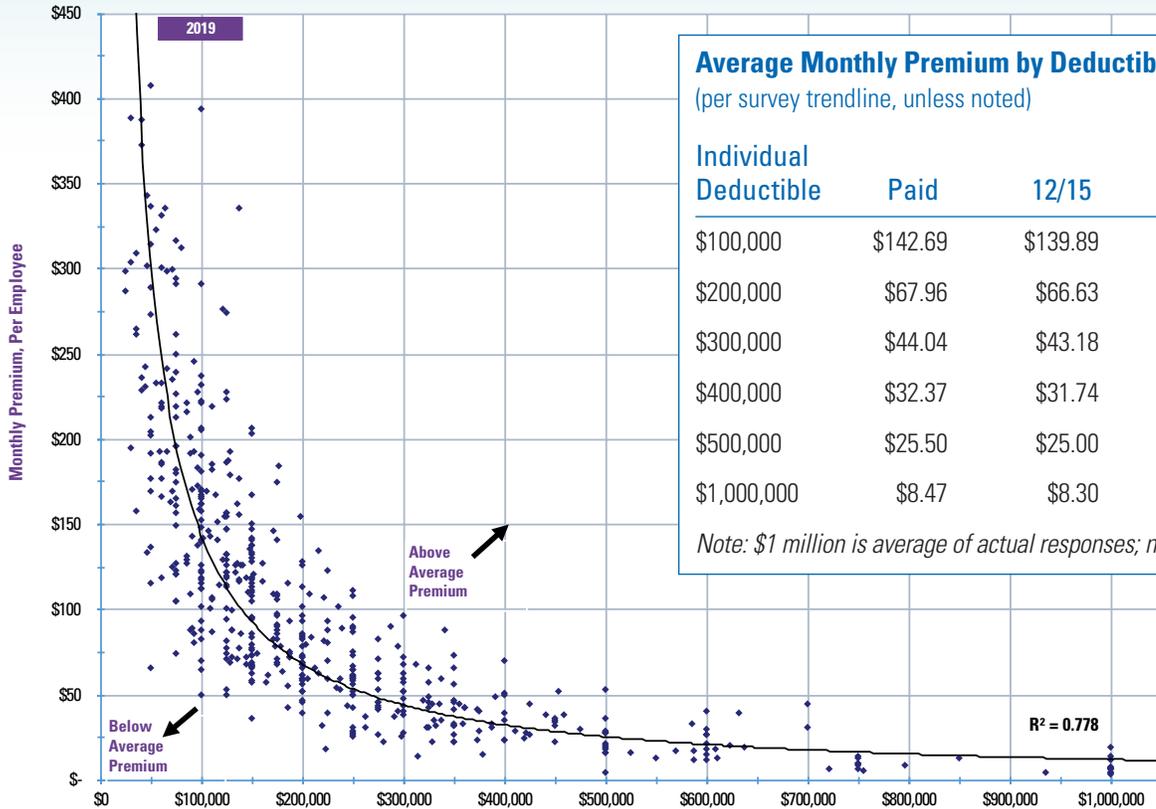
### Which internal audiences are involved in the stop-loss review and final coverage decision? (Check all that apply.)

	2018	2019
Benefits/Human Resources	94%	98%
Risk Management	16%	17%
Finance/CFO	63%	59%
Executive Leadership (e.g., CEO, President)	43%	41%
Other	4%	9%



# 2019 Monthly Premiums, Individual Stop-Loss, by Deductible

(Adjusted to a "Paid" Contract)

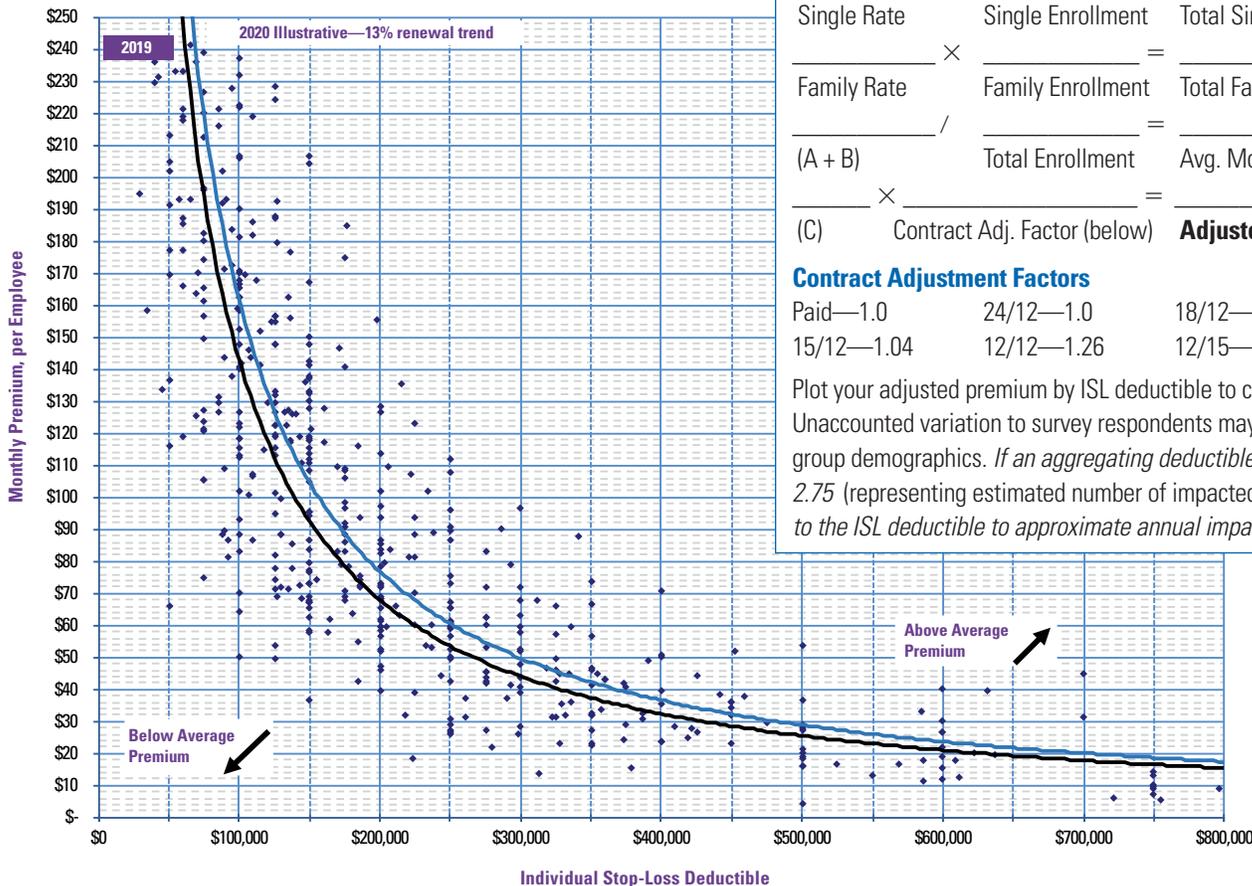


**Average Monthly Premium by Deductible and Contract Type**  
(per survey trendline, unless noted)

Individual Deductible	Paid	12/15	15/12	12/12
\$100,000	\$142.69	\$139.89	\$137.20	\$113.25
\$200,000	\$67.96	\$66.63	\$65.35	\$53.94
\$300,000	\$44.04	\$43.18	\$42.35	\$34.95
\$400,000	\$32.37	\$31.74	\$31.13	\$25.69
\$500,000	\$25.50	\$25.00	\$24.52	\$20.24
\$1,000,000	\$8.47	\$8.30	\$8.14	\$6.72

Note: \$1 million is average of actual responses; n = 13

## Make Your Own Comparison— A Focused Illustration



To calculate your adjusted premium for comparison:

$$\frac{\text{Single Rate}}{\text{Family Rate}} \times \frac{\text{Single Enrollment}}{\text{Family Enrollment}} = \frac{\text{Total Single Premium (A)}}{\text{Total Family Premium (B)}}$$

$$\frac{\text{Total Single Premium (A)}}{\text{Total Family Premium (B)}} \times \frac{\text{Total Family Premium (B)}}{\text{Total Enrollment}} = \frac{\text{Total Single Premium (A)}}{\text{Total Enrollment}}$$

$$\frac{\text{Total Single Premium (A)}}{\text{Total Enrollment}} \times \text{Contract Adj. Factor (below)} = \text{Adjusted Premium}$$

**Contract Adjustment Factors**

Paid—1.0	24/12—1.0	18/12—1.02
15/12—1.04	12/12—1.26	12/15—1.02

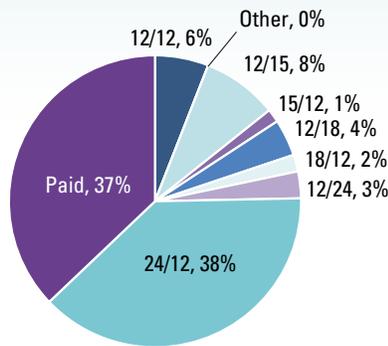
Plot your adjusted premium by ISL deductible to compare with survey. Unaccounted variation to survey respondents may still exist, including group demographics. *If an aggregating deductible exists, divide it by 2.75 (representing estimated number of impacted claimants) and add to the ISL deductible to approximate annual impact.*

# Coverage Specifications

## Contract Type (or Claims Basis)

Contract type has many variations, with “Paid” (i.e., 36/12 and longer) and its close equivalents 24/12 and 12/24 accounting for 78% of plans. All are choices for ongoing, comprehensive coverage. Two options for initial coverage, 12/12 and 12/15, are 6% and 8% respectively.

Contract Type, ISL

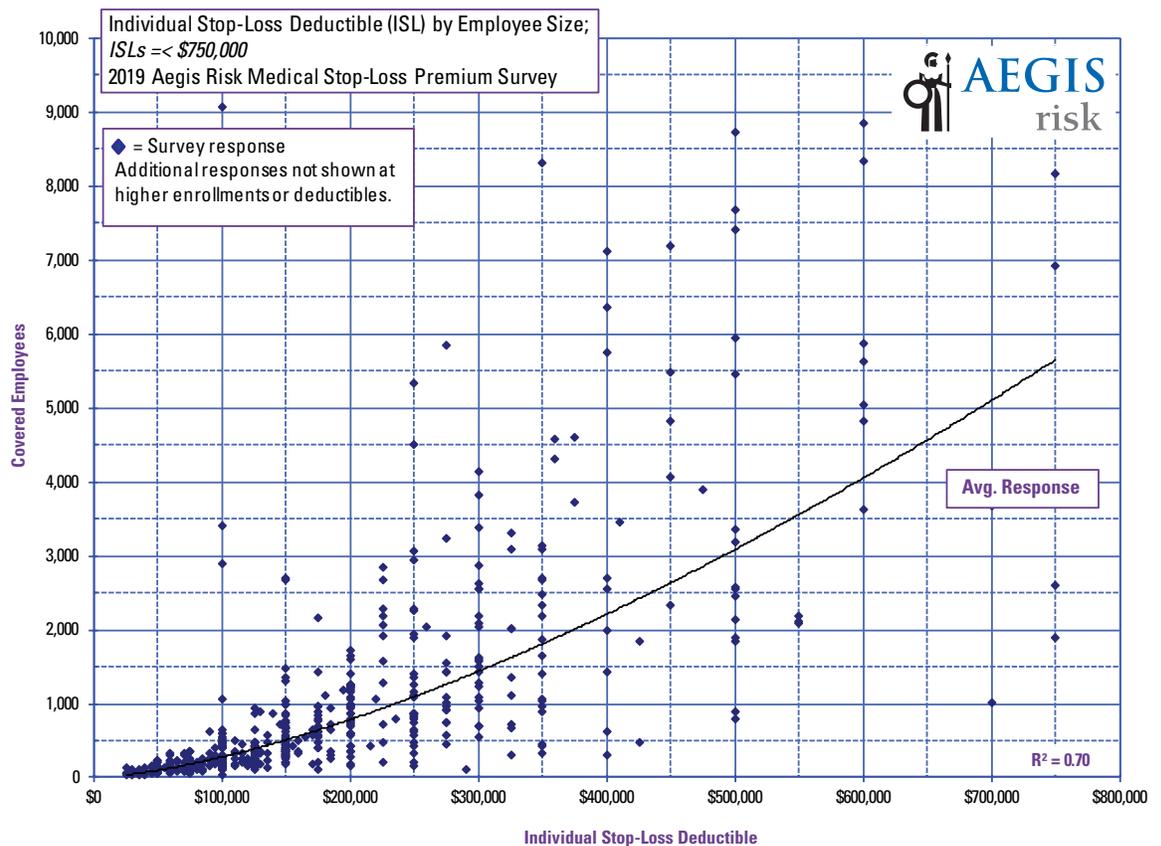


## Pharmacy Coverage

98% of surveyed plans cover pharmacy, an ongoing increase from about 92% in recent years. Increased high-dollar pharmacy exposure is undoubtedly causing the change, and stop-loss without pharmacy coverage is now ill-conceived. There were no submissions for pharmacy-only stop-loss.

## ISL Deductible by Employee Size

Selection of an ISL deductible is an important decision for any plan sponsor. An organization’s own risk tolerance should be its strongest guide—those more risk savvy, if not larger, can manage with higher deductibles. The exhibit to the right highlights the ISL deductible (adjusted for any ASD—divide by 2.75 and add to ISL) of survey respondents by their number of covered employees. A trend line reflecting the average response is provided. ISLs of \$750,000 or less are illustrated. Those plans with an even higher ISL are widely dispersed by enrollment but are often 7,000 employees or much higher.



## Aggregating Specific Deductibles (ASDs)

ASDs, which are separate deductibles requiring fulfillment before any ISL reimbursements, are often leveraged for their ability to ease renewal rate increases. Alternatively, they can retain risk for a policyholder seeking relief only after a multitude of specific “hits.” However, they come with a direct transfer of risk back to the policyholder. Of respondents, 23% reported an ASD, with the average size being 81% of the underlying ISL. In an example, if an ISL is \$200,000, the ASD, on average, is \$162,000 (81%). For adjustment to the survey, any reported ASD was divided by 2.75 (an approximation of the number of claimants necessary to fulfill) and added to the reported ISL for the survey response.

## Aggregate Coverage

This additional coverage, against overutilization of the health plan, is most prevalent alongside ISL deductibles of \$225,000 or less and enrollments around or below 1,000. It becomes less common at higher deductibles and/or enrollments—since those tend to be risk-savvier or more stable plans. 125% is the prevalent level, chosen by 83% of those with aggregate coverage, with 120% next at 11%.

Average monthly premium varies. If alongside an ISL of \$200,000 or less, the average is \$12.83—an increase from \$9.06 in 2018. At higher deductibles, the average is \$3.42. Median premium overall is \$6.69. Although it is a significantly lower expense than ISL, purchasers of aggregate are advised to remain diligent on this expense as well.

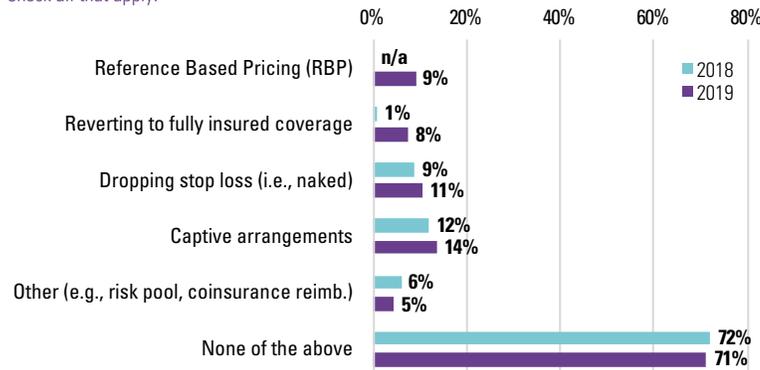
# Catastrophic Claimants

## Risk Management Strategies

Fueled by further rising costs, alternative delivery and risk mechanisms are being offered or discussed with self-funded plan sponsors, including reference-based pricing and captive arrangements. However, maintaining the status quo seems most prevalent, with 71% responding “none of the above,” consistent with recent years. Captives have the greatest interest, but slight, at 14%.

## Risk Management Strategies, Planned for Review

Check all that apply.

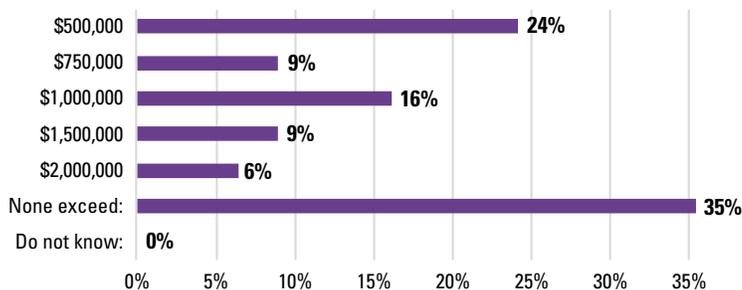


## Presence of Catastrophic Claimants

The rising level of truly catastrophic claimants (>\$500,000) continues to alarm plan sponsors and underwriters alike. Various attributions include more aggressive hospital billing as well as specialty pharmacy and orphan drug therapies. When inquired on the last two policy periods, 64% of respondents incurred a claimant in excess of \$500,000—up from 58% in 2018. However, claimants in excess of \$1 million are rising at 31%, with 6% of those in excess of \$2 million.

## Highest Paid Claimant, In Excess

In One Policy Year, Over Last Two



## The Survey

Sponsored jointly by Aegis Risk and the International Society of Certified Employee Benefit Specialists.

The 2019 Aegis Risk Medical Stop-Loss Premium Survey represents 539 plan sponsors covering over 940,000 employees with \$464 million in annual stop-loss premium. Respondents range in size from 31 employees to over 48,000.

The 2020 survey opens late spring 2020, with release in late summer. Visit [www.aegisrisk.com](http://www.aegisrisk.com) to participate or register for notification. All respondents receive an immediate copy upon its release. Employers as well as brokers and consultants are encouraged to participate.

## About Aegis Risk

Aegis Risk is a specialty consulting firm with a dedicated focus on stop-loss—throughout the plan year.

Visit us at [www.aegisrisk.com](http://www.aegisrisk.com) for more information. We help our employer clients and broker/consultant partners obtain:

- Aggressive proposals from leading underwriters
- Market insights, including underwriting and pricing dynamics
- Ongoing claims monitoring and filing support
- Internal risk pool structuring and other creative approaches.

Contact us today for a complimentary review of your coverage or to discuss the market:

Ryan Siemers, CEBS | Principal | Phone: (703) 778-6520 | [ryan.siemers@aegisrisk.com](mailto:ryan.siemers@aegisrisk.com)

## About the International Society of Certified Employee Benefit Specialists (ISCEBS)

The International Society of Certified Employee Benefit Specialists is a nonprofit educational association providing continuing education opportunities for those who hold or are pursuing the Certified Employee Benefit Specialist® (CEBS®), Group Benefits Associate (GBA), Retirement Plans Associate (RPA) or Compensation Management Specialist (CMS) designations offered through the CEBS program. Visit the Society website at [www.iscebs.org](http://www.iscebs.org).

## Lasered Claimants

At the initial writing of coverage, or potentially at renewal, an underwriter may exclude—or *laser*—certain individuals from coverage. This may occur at a higher deductible or possibly to full exclusion. Of respondents, 19% reported the presence of at least one known lasered claimant—similar to recent years.

## 2020 Renewal Premiums and Strategies

### Renewal Premiums

Stop-loss typically renews at higher than underlying medical trend due to leveraging—whereby an unchanged deductible bears a larger percentage of future claims. Historically, this may produce requested increase of 20% or higher. However, actual stop-loss pricing, as measured by this survey over the past two years, generally reflects a net increase of 10 to 14%—with greater increase on higher ISLs of \$400,000 or more, where leveraged trend is more amplified. However, the rising occurrence of claimants \$1 million or more continues to increase claims to premium loss ratios for underwriters (and erode profits). Indication exists that renewal increases may get steeper. Altogether, we illustrate (as opposed to forecast) a 13% market-wide leveraged trend for 2020 premiums. However, increases approaching 20% may not be uncommon. Actual plan results will vary, especially for those with significant and ongoing claim activity or, alternatively, stronger claim results.

### Renewal Strategies

Actions to reduce your stop-loss premium and ensure adequate coverage:

- Index deductible to medical trend. If not annually, at least biannually.
- Be aggressive! Ask for reductions or review competitive offers, including dividend contracts. Leverage your plan data, including PPO discounts.
- Carefully manage your claims disclosure. Avoid coverage gaps due to nondisclosed claimants.
- Match your risk and your stop-loss contract. Seek those that “mirror” your health plan document and offer “laser-free” renewals with rate caps.
- Be knowledgeable. Identify the best underwriter options, including those beyond your health plan’s offerings.
- Use an experienced broker or consultant. Stop-loss is highly specialized coverage, with very high claim exposures. It is not an employee benefit. A less experienced advisor can cost your plan hundreds of thousands in premium costs if not in uncovered claims.