artemis® HEALTH

How To Choose A Benefits Data Partner: Your Comprehensive Guide

How to ask the right questions, evaluate vendors, and make an informed decision.

The most expensive software you'll ever purchase is the software that no one uses.

Benefits administration is a constantly shifting landscape. Just when you think you've achieved stable footing in your strategy, a new "earthquake" in the form of trendy programs, chronic health concerns, or rising expense forces you to reevaluate where you stand. It's what makes your job as a benefits professional challenging, exciting, and yes, frustrating.

You know that data is the key to evaluating your existing benefits programs, finding opportunities for value, or justifying new programs. Finding a data partner is a tremendous undertaking. It requires:

- Evaluating available vendors
- Potentially conducting a lengthy RFP process
- Aligning with company goals and strategies
- Integrating a new technology
- Training your team

Your time is already at a premium, so you can't afford to make this decision lightly. In this whitepaper, you'll learn the key considerations and criteria you should use to evaluate, select, implement and support a new benefits data platform. We'll focus on the following critical traits of an effective analytics tool:

- Access to All, Actionable Data
- A Positive User Experience for Everyone
- Transparency and Value
- All Benefit Activities in One Location
- A True Partnership

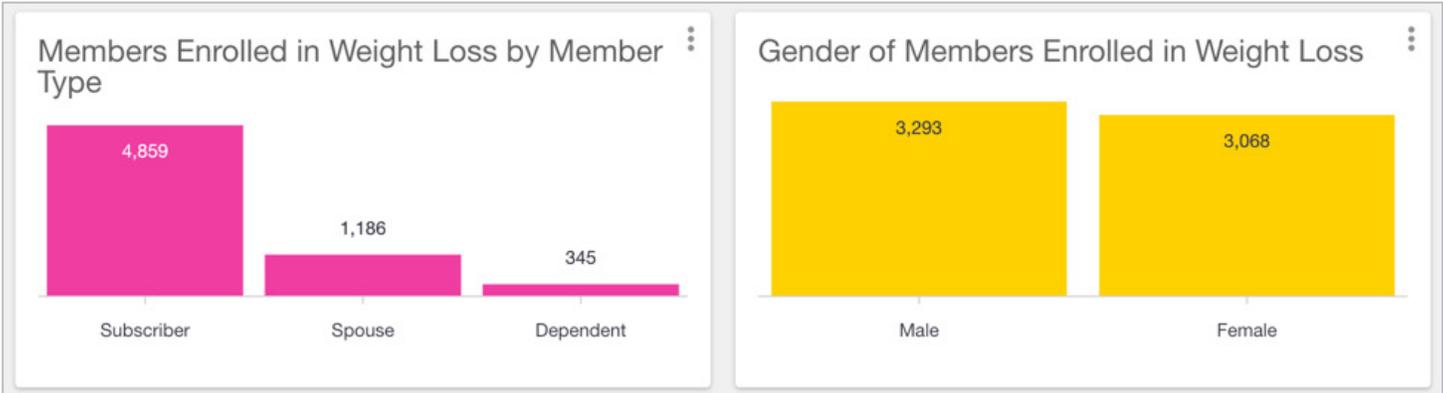Learn more about the Artemis Platform at:

artemishealth.com

1.1 Access to All, Actionable Data

Traditionally, data warehouses provide "snapshots" or status reports that allow you to see what's happening right now. However, some data warehouses do a better job of identifying why something is happening, and what steps you can take to impact it.

What's happening.
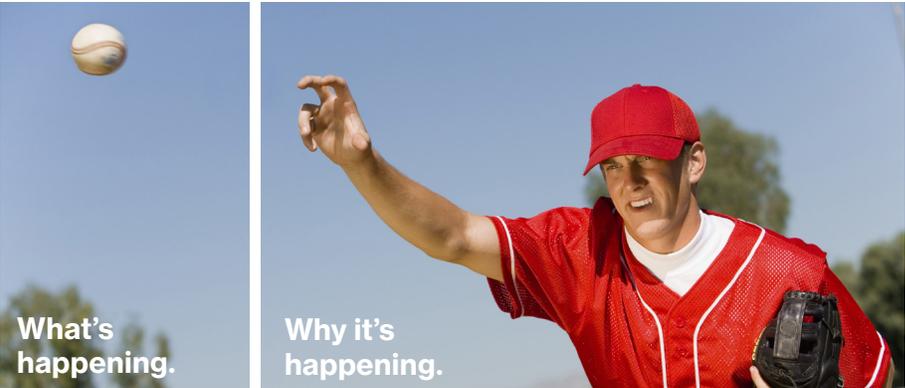
Why it's happening.

Look for a data analytics platform that gathers all of your data into one location and allows you to easily look across different data feeds. This will help you move beyond, "What's happening?" to "What can I do about it?"

Let's look at a real-world example. One Artemis customer wanted to take action on diabetes to reduce costs and help members lead healthier lives. They looked across their medical claims, prescription claims, and wellness program data to find out if members with diabetes were participating in their weight loss program.

Members Enrolled in Weight Loss by Member Type

Subscriber	4,859
Spouse	1,186
Dependent	345

Gender of Members Enrolled in Weight Loss

Male	3,293
Female	3,068

1.1 Key Questions to Ask

- How is your data warehouse solution-focused instead of report-focused?

- Can your tool show us not only what is going on with benefits data, but also why it is happening?

- Provide examples of how you are able to crosswalk or look across groups of individuals across different data feeds.

- What type of data quality checks and processes do you have?

They were also able to look at specific drugs that were driving spending, which months of the year showed better engagement with the wellness program (January saw a spike for those post-holiday resolutions), and which office locations were most likely to participate. Armed with this data, a benefits team can roll out better communications to low-engagement locations, switch wellness vendors to suit their needs, or adjust their formulary to favor less expensive, equally potent drugs.

Not only should you be able to perform cross-walking functions like this, but you should be able to do so quickly without requiring a professional service engagement that will take weeks and potentially incur additional costs. By ensuring accurate, clear data and the ability to "cross-walk" your information across various vendor feeds, you'll be able to tell stories, share insights, store resources, and quickly make great decisions.

1.2 A Positive User Experience for Everyone

Remember when you had to pop a disk into your computer and type a complex code to open a piece of software? Well, those days are long gone. As they should be. When evaluating a data vendor, you should ensure the software is easy and comfortable to use—it shouldn't be any more complicated than the other websites you visit in your daily life. A great data warehouse should be designed to be used by both novices and experts.

You should also consider the speed and ease of using a data tool. Some vendors' queries and reports take hours to run, and must be run repeatedly in the event of mistakes. Look for a platform that makes running repeated, overlapping queries fast and simple.

1.2 Key Questions to Ask

- How does your data warehouse consider both novice and power users?

- What experience do we need to use and get benefit out of your tool? (e.g. analysts background, actuarial background, etc.)

- What training do you provide? How long does it take to get comfortable using your data warehouse?

- Can my entire team have access? Consultants? Finance? C-Suite? How are the data and insights shared between different users?

Your data warehouse should help you find quick wins, and also address collaboration of any brokers/consultants. From there, as you find more comfort and success in the software, it will justify doing deeper explorations to support the health and wellness of your members while also monitoring spend.

Once you have great insights or a visual business case for a new program, you need to be able to share it with the right people. Look for a tool that enables secure, visual sharing inside the tool with the CHRO, VP of HR, benefits teams, analysts, actuaries, finance, or even outside consultants and brokers.

1.3 Key Questions to Ask

- How do you price for annual access or subscription? How many users will have access to the tool?

- What are the implementation costs for your services?

- How often will data be imported? Is the price different whether data feeds are updated annually, quarterly, or monthly?

- What types of data feeds are allowed? How much does each feed cost? How many data feeds can we have?

1.3 Transparency and Value

There are a lot of ways in which data warehouse vendors charge for their services. Sometimes it can feel confusing and a bit like being 'nickeled and dimed.' Vendors charge different rates for the timeliness of data, frequency of updates, and one-off custom reports or analyses. Look for software that doesn't require you to pay additional costs to get to your data and answers faster.

Some vendors also charge for additional users, more historical data, the number of data feeds, large implementation costs, and ongoing support services. Make sure that you are aware of these additional costs and services to get a full idea of the cost and to properly compare vendors and their services.

1.4 All Benefit Activities in One Location

The average employer now has 10+ benefit programs, and each of those comes with its own handy data feed. A competitive data warehouse vendor should help you positively impact the health and wellness of employees through support for all your benefits activities.

Not only do you want all of your data in one location, but you also want a platform that considers the many other steps in your benefits strategy.

Identify Opportunity

Build Case

Measure Results
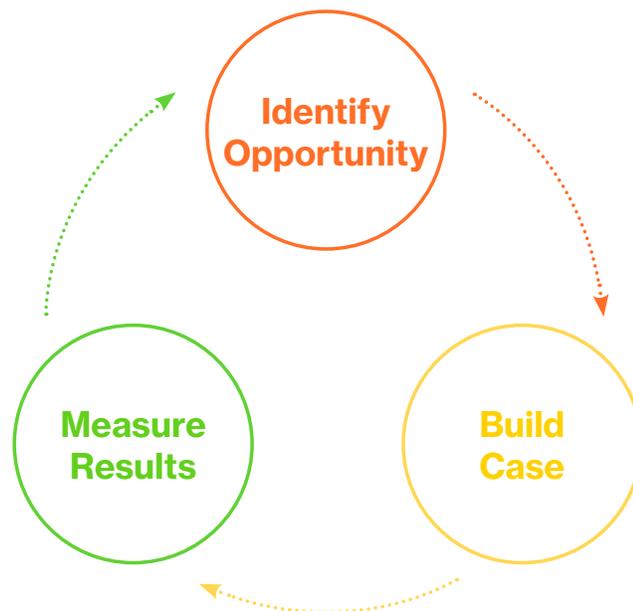
- **Identify Opportunity.** A successful data platform will allow your team and trusted consultants to identify problems clearly through pre-built models and content that will bubble up answers for you.

- **Build Case.** You not only should be able to run analysis with pivot tables and SQL, but you should be able to easily look across the different data types without requiring additional professional services. A great platform will help you build the case for your benefits solutions and share your findings with the right people.

- **Measure Results.** Finally, you should be able to run analysis, like matched pair cohorts inside the platform, to measure your success. A great data tool enables you to justify strategic adjustments to get better utilization out of any benefit plan or program.

1.5 A True Partnership

Companies invest heavily in their benefits platform, expecting a long-term, satisfying partnership that is responsive, supportive, collaborative, and ultimately empowering them with data-driven decision-making.

When evaluating a data warehouse, references from current clients are helpful. Reach out to any peers who are using the provider's platform. No analytical solution is perfect, but it's important to find out how the service provider responds when something goes wrong, not just when things are going well. Fully understand how they take care of your data and protect the privacy of your employees and their family members.

Also understand what their long-term vision is with their company, what motivates them, what competing interests the company may have internally, and how comfortable you feel about their commitment to providing great service.

Evaluating a benefits data partner is a big undertaking, and Artemis Health understands the hurdles you face. We do our best to approach any evaluation process with clear information, open communication, and a dedication to service.

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Artemis Health uses a series of tools (we call them "apps) to make benefits data analysis fast, easy and actionable. Want to learn more? We're here to help.

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