The CFO's playbook: 7 strategic plays to drive health & wellbeing ROI

For years, health and wellbeing sat squarely in the HR department. The reality is healthcare benefits represent the second largest expense line item on the income statement. Given healthcare costs are continually rising, now is not the time to be passive.

Scott Charles
CFO at Personify Health

Scott Charles, CFO at Personify Health, recently put it bluntly to *Forbes*: the days of passive administration are dead. If the C-suite isn't driving the health strategy, the strategy (and the costs) will drive the business.

"You've got to be super proactive. You should have a list of the 5-10 initiatives that you're doing to drive down your healthcare costs. You should demand a monthly or quarterly meeting with the broker to say, 'Show me the 10 initiatives. Show me the actions we've taken. Show me the savings that we've generated."

His warning for finance leaders is stark: **"If you don't get ahead of it, you're going to be well behind the curve."**

This playbook has 7 strategic plays to help you do just that.

Tackle high-cost claims with smarter care management

In a typical year, just 5% of your members will drive over 50% of your total healthcare spend. These aren't just standard doctor visits; they are complex cancer diagnoses, cardiovascular disease cases, premature birth, or major spinal surgeries.

When one of these claims hits, it creates a sudden, unbudgeted shock to your P&L that can wipe out your entire year's worth of savings in one fell swoop.

Quite simply: Unmanaged care leads to spiraling costs; managed care leads to stability.

Your next action:

Audit your top claimants – roughly 10% of your workforce, to be cautious. Are they navigating the system by themselves, or do they need additional support?

You need to implement a high-tech (and backed by human expertise!) care management solution immediately. Ensure these members have clinical advocates to steer them away from low-quality, high-cost providers and toward support that helps them before costs spiral.

Metrics to show return-on-investment

- **Reduction in high-cost medical events:** Fewer claims that exceed the stop loss threshold, driven by earlier intervention and better care coordination.

- **Lower total cost of care through smarter care delivery:** Savings achieved by guiding care to the most appropriate and cost-effective setting.

- **Lower hospital readmissions:** A decrease in the number of members returning to the hospital within 30 days, signaling more effective care and recovery support.
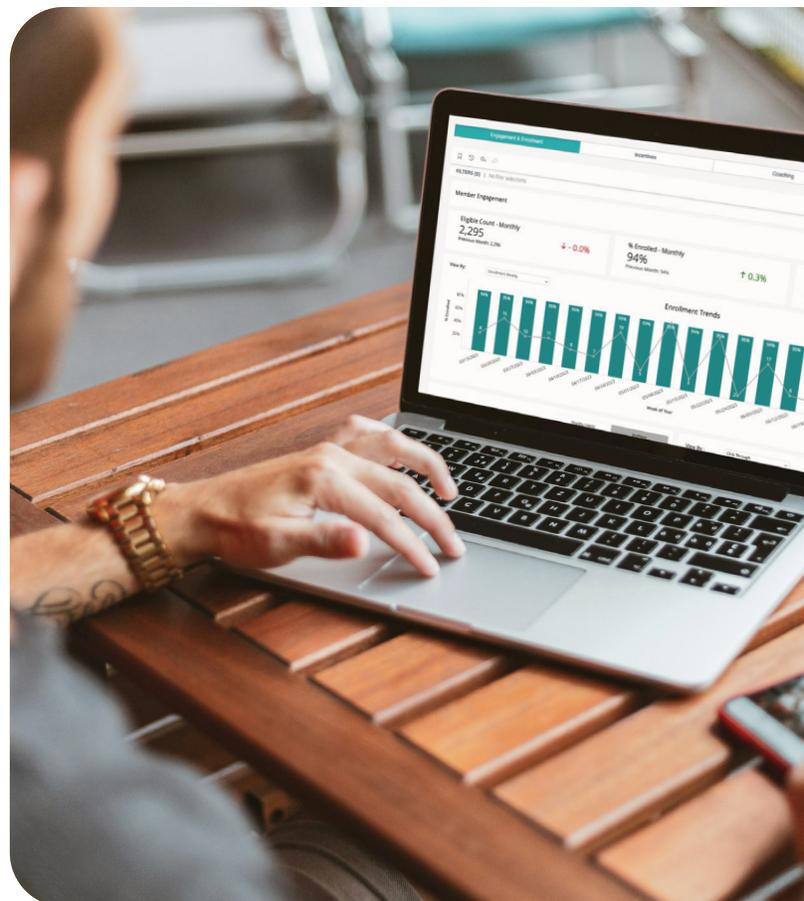
The Personify Health difference

14% lower medical costs for high-cost claimants ($100k+)

52% lower high-risk newborn-related costs (lower NICU spend)

Become a champion for preventive care

"You can pay me now, or you can pay me a lot more later". This is the foundation of healthcare math. A preventive screening might cost $100. But a Stage 4 cancer treatment costs $100,000+.

Likewise, a flu shot costs less than a lunch. A week out of work to recover from flu, does not.

Yet, when budgets get tight, preventive measures (like health & wellbeing initiatives) are often the first to get cut. According to Prevent Cancer Foundation, only half of American adults say they've had a medical routine appointment or cancer screening in the past year. That's a 10-percentage-point drop from 2024.

Your next action:

Incentivize the small actions that prevent the big bills with an active approach. You need a platform that doesn't just "offer" screenings but actively drives members toward them through incentives, rewards, and personalized nudges.

- **Incentivize screenings:** Make the annual check-up a non-negotiable by tying it to premium differentials or HSA contributions. At Personify Health, employees get 500 platform points when they take 3 preventive actions!

- **Promote vaccinations:** Reduce the seasonal absence & productivity dip caused by flu and COVID.

- **Support healthy lifestyle programs:** Weight management and smoking cessation are not vanity projects; they are risk reduction strategies for some of the leading killers in the United States: heart disease and stroke.

Metrics to show return-on-investment

- **Absenteeism and productivity trends:** Are your people present and performing? Look at: reduction in missed workdays and the boost in output when employees are healthy, focused, and resilient.

- **Overall health data:** What are the trends in your employees' health? Is it looking steady? Are there any risks?

- **Prevention compliance:** How many health actions are your people taking to prevent avoidable health risks? *Personify Health members take an average 6+ health actions per session.*
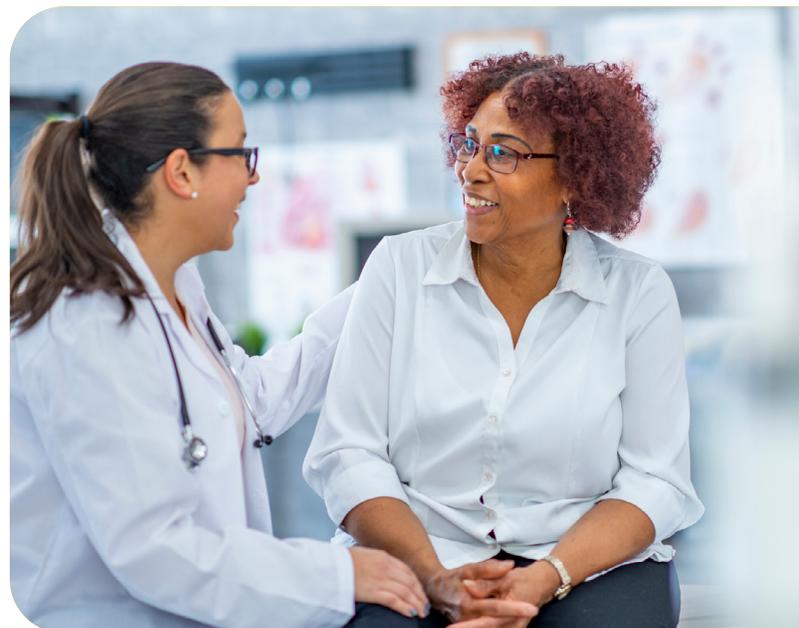
The Personify Health difference

23% more preventive visits, including cholesterol, mammogram, and cervical cancer screening rates

$788 absenteeism costs saved per improved member

Get ahead of GLP-1 management

With the astronomical popularity of GLP-1s, many CFOs are seeing the cost of pharmacy rise to double digits. But here's the catch: these drugs do not work long-term.

They might be helping people lose weight initially, but they're not helping them keep the weight off. The goal isn't to be anti-specialty drugs. It's to manage them effectively.

If you pay for an expensive weight-loss drug without encouraging behavioral change, you're paying for a – very costly – temporary fix.

Did you know?

30% of people discontinue GLP-1s within their first four weeks, and over half stop within the first year. GLP-1s might be a quick fix, but it doesn't create long lasting behavioral change. A wrap-around program is key to driving necessary, lasting behavioral change.

Your next action:

GLP-1s are a powerful jumpstart, but they aren't the whole finish line. Because these drugs are a major line item, you need a way to make the results stick. By combining clinical intervention with tools that track movement, stress, and nutrition, you move from "renting" weight loss to owning long-term health.

Want to learn more about GLP-1 management?

The real GLP-1 cost crisis

Why short-term use drives long-term costs – and what employers can do about it

Read The real GLP-1 cost crisis and Beyond the script: A smarter chronic condition management

Metrics to show return-on-investment

- **Adherence-to-value ratio:** If members aren't hitting the 80% adherence threshold (the clinical standard for efficacy), you're effectively paying for expensive medication that provides little value. Calculate how many users are adhering vs non-adhering, based on the total GLP-1 spend. Your result is your next strategic play.

- **Total health improvement:** Monitor member data for outcomes like: lower blood pressure, decreased weight, improved physical activity, etc. Better health means better business!

The Personify Health difference

85% of members improved their eating habits

78% of members increased physical activity

Leverage technology to power your plan

Healthcare costs don't spiral because of one big failure — they rise because of thousands of small, disconnected decisions happening every day.

Claims are processed in isolation. Members struggle to engage. Fraud, waste, and abuse slip through unnoticed. And finance teams are left reacting after the money is already gone.

The difference between a high-performing health plan and an expensive one? Technology. The right digital foundation connects engagement, claims, and insights into a system that works proactively, not retrospectively.

Modern health technology should do three things exceptionally well:

- **Drive high-frequency engagement:** It must function like a consumer product to ensure members actually use the benefits you're paying for.

- **Enable prospective risk detection:** It must identify high-cost claimants and billing waste before they hit your claims ledger.

- **Convert data into action:** It must trigger immediate clinical actions, moving beyond static, backward-looking reports.

This isn't about replacing human judgment. It's about giving it better signals, sooner. At Personify, we see technology as an operating lever, not an admin tool.

A recent peer-reviewed study on fraud, waste and abuse (FWA) proves that AI could be a game-

changer. By deploying AI-driven technology, researchers from Personify Health, Health at Scale, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the University of Michigan, saw an $11.8 million reduction in paid claims in just eight months.

> *"When detecting FWA, we have to move beyond just looking at the large claims. AI allows us to see the entire landscape. When you show me $11.8 million in savings, you're leveraging technology to drive meaningful savings.*
>
> **- Scott Charles, CFO, Personify Health**

Your next action:

Implement an integrated, tech-enabled third party administrator, like Personify Health, that audits claims *before* they are paid. If a claim looks wrong, the system flags it in milliseconds.

Metrics to show return-on-investment

- **Recouped funds:** How much "lost" money did you successfully bring back into the business from billing errors?

- **Billing precision:** A steady decrease in the number of claims that need to be re-processed or corrected.

The Personify Health difference

58% of high-cost claims decreased

Average savings $20,513/claim

Play 5

Find a smarter Plan Administrator or make yours work harder for you

Healthcare is no longer sustainable. Companies are in need of a smarter plan administrator that provides innovative plan design and is structured to pursue cost control in a variety of ways, at all levels of the benefits and healthcare process. Smart TPAs will have their own list of cost levers that they and their trusted partners can bring to a client's program. A multi-pronged, always-on approach may include levers like AI-driven payment integrity that offers a more thorough claims validation process, out-of-network (OON) negotiations with strategies and staff focused on closing OON leaks, and reference-based pricing (RBP).

Metrics to show return-on-investment

- **Cost savings:** How much is your plan saving you on healthcare costs each year?

- **Health engagement:** How often are your people engaging with their health and benefits? Does it serve as the hub for members to manage health and benefits?

The Personify Health difference

"The financial impact has been undeniable – saving us millions and adding real value to our enterprise. It's a solution that not only works, but empowers us to think differently about healthcare."

– Todd Torvinen, CFO, ZMC Hotels

Your next action:

Challenge your partners.

Ask for a demonstration of what they're doing beyond claims administration to deliver an engaging, consumer-grade member and client experience, manage costs, and improve health outcomes.

- Can a health check-up trigger a care recommendation automatically?

- Does your plan offer innovative plan designs and cost containment strategies?

- Does it provide a consumer-grade digital experience that serves as the hub for managing health and benefits?

If the answer is "we'll get back to you," it's time to look for a partner with a modern tech stack, like Personify Health.

ZMC cumulatively saved $4.5 million over 3 years with Personify Health

Read now →

Build a truly personalized health platform

Too many vendors can kill your budget and member engagement. 88% of employees use up to 5 apps just to access health benefits – no wonder average engagement is less than 10%.

Personify Health clients see an average of 51% member engagement.

True engagement is the bridge between a benefit and its ROI. If your employees don't know benefits or better health journeys exist, you are paying for a ghost.

A personalized platform creates a "single front door" where risk reduction and member experience live in the same place.

Your next action:

Consolidate the noise. Instead of five different apps, move to a single platform. Use a system that leverages personalized notifications based on a member's specific health risks.

Metrics to show return-on-investment

- **Engagement rate:** How many of your employees are actually using the health tools every month?

- **Fee reduction:** How much did you save by cutting out redundant vendor fees?

- **Admin time saved:** How many hours did your team save by managing one partner instead of ten?

The Personify Health difference

51% average member engagement

20% fewer avoidable ER visits

Showcase ROI with ease

You shouldn't have to wait for a quarterly meeting to know how your program or solution is performing. You need a "single pane of glass" that shows you cost and outcomes in real-time.

Wouldn't it be great to see the answers to these questions in one glance?!

"I want to see the 10 initiatives. Show me the actions we've taken. If we don't get ahead of the curve, we're going to be well behind it."

"Of the employees we identified as 'High Risk' 12 months ago, how many have migrated into a 'Lower Risk' category today due to platform engagement?"

"What is the correlation between our top engagers on the health platform and their rates of absenteeism or short-term disability claims compared to the non-engaged population?"

Your next play:

Request a real-time data portal that tracks your top cost-saving initiatives. This allows you to course-correct in month two, rather than waiting until month twelve.

Metrics to show return-on-investment

- **Spending vs. budget:** Are you spending more or less than you predicted this month?

- **Overall employee health:** Is our workforce getting "healthier" or "riskier" based on the data?

- **Smart spending shift:** Are you moving money away from expensive ER visits and toward more affordable primary care?

The Personify Health difference

$4.8M average cost impact per client from reduced absenteeism

$654 average costs saved per employee with improved health

About Personify Health

By bringing industry-leading third-party administration, holistic wellbeing, and navigation solutions together, all in one place, we have created the industry's first and only personalized health platform.

With decades of experience and global operations, we empower diverse and unique businesses – and diverse and unique people – to engage more deeply in health at a lower cost. Through our proprietary combination of data-driven personalization, science-backed methodology, and concierge-level clinical expertise, our end-to-end platform makes it easier to proactively address people's needs across their lives. With a personalized, holistic, and powerfully simple experience, we are redefining industry expectations and what it means to manage health.

Let's talk →

Learn more at personifyhealth.com

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