

Janet Lucas-Taylor pushes for 'bold action' in benefits



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Janet Lucas-Taylor of Business Health Care Group
KENNY YOO/MBJ



By [Logan Hanson](#) – Reporter, Milwaukee Business Journal
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Story Highlights

[What's This?](#)

- Janet Lucas-Taylor is Business Health Care Group's executive director.
- She assumed the role in September.
- She plans to increase education programs and vendor partnerships for members.

Janet Lucas-Taylor said she has been preparing for her role her entire career.

In September, she was named the executive director of Business Health Care Group of Wisconsin, a member-owned limited liability corporation that characterizes itself as a collective action group.

“I absolutely knew this is something that I wanted to do throughout my career, and I've specifically focused my attention on gathering the skills needed to do this role,” Lucas-Taylor said. “I think the work that the coalition is doing is so important and can provide so much value to employers and their employees, so I think we have a tremendous opportunity here.”

Lucas-Taylor has spent her career cultivating skills and knowledge in health and benefits programs, including at Fortune 500 and 1000 companies.

She started off in the vendor space. That experience, the West Allis native said, allowed her to work closely with employers who purchased products and to learn how senior leaders think and how benefits professionals implement products and plans.

Her career path changed when she took a job in health and group benefits consulting with Willis Towers Watson. The coalition was her first client assignment.

“It changed the focus and trajectory of my career,” Lucas-Taylor said. “I found something that I was very passionate about, because the employers in this community, their passion was so contagious.”

Business Health Care Group, based in Waukesha, dates to 2003. Leaders of several major employers in the area established the coalition as they sought to curb health care expenses.

The organization counts among its members major Milwaukee-area employers such as A. O. Smith Corp., GE HealthCare, Kohl's, Northwestern Mutual and Rockwell Automation, according to a directory.

The role with Willis Towers Watson helped Lucas-Taylor develop knowledge of how health care functions in Wisconsin, as well as about how the coalition operates and the employers it works with.

She spent more time with Business Health Care Group when she served on the organization's executive steering committee during her nearly five years at Northwestern Mutual.

That was Lucas-Taylor's first time working directly for a company in its benefits department. She said it helped her gain valuable experience in understanding what employees and employers are looking for and how to manage a department.

Lucas-Taylor's tenure at Northwestern Mutual was followed by a stint at Mr. Cooper Group Inc., a Texas-based national home loan servicer that in October was acquired by Rocket Cos. for \$14.2 billion. Her last position before joining Business Health Care Group was as vice president of benefits at Mr. Cooper.

Lucas-Taylor assumed leadership of the group following the [retirement of Jeff Kluever](#). Her hiring marked an achievement Lucas-Taylor had been pursuing for some time — a goal she communicated to former colleagues.

“When she was part of our organization, she did share with me that one of her aspirations was to lead the Business Health Care Group, and it was even then that I recognized she was uniquely fitted for that role because of her passion and her energy,” said Todd Smasal, the vice president of total rewards and employee value proposition at Northwestern Mutual.

Smasal led Lucas-Taylor's department during her time with the life insurance giant. He is a member of the coalition's executive steering committee.

Now in the position she long coveted, Lucas-Taylor has several plans she wants to implement.

The first is incorporating more activities by the group surrounding education and trainings for individuals in benefits or total rewards teams for the coalition's member companies. These would occur year-round and would feature different industry speakers and ways for the benefits teams to interact with each other and network.

Another initiative Lucas-Taylor has her eye on is to increase collaboration through a wider set of industry and vendor partners. The goal is to improve quality in health care and lower the total cost of care.

Companies across the country are [expecting a 9.5% increase in employee health care costs in 2026](#), according to global professional services firm Aon.

“Our vendor partners, specifically related to our high-performance network and our new pharmacy vendor, both of those solutions can help employers lower overall costs in the short term,” Lucas-Taylor said. “Secondarily, it is those efforts around partnering with the provider community and other partners within the market to really focus on areas that will drive longer-term cost containment and increase quality here in the market.”

Lucas-Taylor's advice to health and group benefits professionals is that they should not fear taking “bold action.”

“Consider all your options and really keep the business and the employee at the forefront as you think about your benefit strategy,” Lucas-Taylor said.

About Janet Lucas-Taylor

- **Company:** Business Health Care Group
- **Title:** Executive director
- **Education:** Bachelor's degree in political science from Northern Michigan University
- **Hometown:** West Allis
- **Residence:** Mequon
- **Hobbies:** Trail running and coaching master's swimming
- **Favorite Milwaukee-area activity:** Summerfest