**United States General Accounting Office** 

GAO

Fact Sheet for the Chairman and the Ranking Minority Member, Subcommittee on Health, Committee on Ways and Means, House of Representatives

September 1991

### TAX ADMINISTRATION

# Administrative Aspects of the Health Insurance Tax Credit







United States General Accounting Office Washington, D.C. 20548

#### **General Government Division**

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September 12, 1991

The Honorable Fortney H. (Pete) Stark Chairman, Subcommittee on Health Committee on Ways and Means House of Representatives

The Honorable Bill Gradison Ranking Minority Member Subcommittee on Health Committee on Ways and Means House of Representatives

This fact sheet responds to your request for a basic description of how the recently enacted health insurance tax credit will work administratively. The health insurance tax credit is provided to low-income wage earners who contribute to a health insurance policy that includes coverage for at least one qualifying child. Because this credit is so new, you were interested in a description of how the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) intends to administer the credit and how the credit might be perceived by taxpayers. Because IRS is still in the process of putting together forms and instructions, our presentation is based on preliminary information that we obtained in discussions with IRS officials.

## Eligibility for the Credit

The Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1990 provides taxpayers who qualify for the Earned Income Credit (EIC) and contribute toward the purchase of health insurance for a qualifying child an additional credit to offset taxes owed. Even taxpayers with no tax liability may receive a payment from IRS. The law took effect on January 1, 1991.

Qualified health insurance expenses for which the credit is available are amounts paid during the taxable year for health insurance coverage that includes one or more qualifying children. These expenses include only those relating to the cost of coverage. Thus, insurance expenses such as co-payments or deductibles, as well as other out-of-pocket medical expenses, are not qualified health insurance expenses.

In addition, qualified insurance expenses do not include amounts paid by an employee who contributes to his or her employer-sponsored

 $<sup>^1</sup>$ In order to be a qualifying child, an individual must satisfy a relationship test, a residency test, and an age test.

health plan on a pretax basis. For example, employees with flexible benefit plans contribute toward health insurance and pay taxes on gross wages less those contributions. Such contributions do not qualify for the health insurance tax credit. However, qualified health expenses do include employee payments to employer-sponsored health insurance. If the employee contributes to an employer-sponsored plan an amount that is included in taxable income, that amount is eligible for the credit.

### Calculating the Credit

To claim the credit, the taxpayer will be required to file the Schedule EIC for Form 1040 or Schedule 4 for Form 1040A. Appendix I contains a copy of Schedule EIC. The taxpayer will need to submit the name of the insurance company and the total amount the taxpayer contributed to a qualifying health insurance policy.

The calculation of the health credit will be generally the same as the calculation of the basic EIC. Thus, the same eligibility criteria and earned income phase-in and phase-out requirements will apply. However, unlike the basic EIC, the health credit will remain the same regardless of the number of qualifying children in the family.

In a computation similar to that required for the EIC, calculating the health insurance credit will require the taxpayer to read the appropriate amount of health insurance credit from a table provided with instructions. The proposed table is in appendix II.

The maximum allowable credit is to be calculated on the basis of a percentage of earned income. Over the phase-in range, the credit will be 6 percent of earned income. Once earned income reaches \$7,125, the maximum credit remains at \$428 as earned income rises to \$11,275. For higher earned income, the credit phases out at a rate of 4.285 percent and disappears for earned incomes of \$21,250 or more. The allowable credit is limited to no more than the actual cost of family coverage to the taxpayer. Thus, the credit is limited to the lesser of the amount calculated by the taxpayer on the basis of earned income and the actual qualified health insurance expenses. For example, a person with earned income of \$6,500 and one qualifying child for whom the taxpayer is paying \$30 per month (\$360 per year) in health insurance premium can receive a health insurance credit of no more than \$360. In this example, the maximum health insurance credit allowed is \$391, but the credit is limited to the actual amount paid.

IRS plans to include safeguards in the instructions and on the form to make sure that taxpayers do not enter an amount of credit greater than the total amount of their contributions to any health insurance policy. The resulting credit is then to be placed on the tax form along with other credits. The items are to be added together for a total credit, and computation is to proceed as normal.

### Administrative Issues Raised by IRS

Administratively, the taxpayer will be required to keep proof of payments of or contributions toward health insurance. If employers do not provide information to taxpayers concerning the amount of taxpayers' contributions toward health insurance premiums, taxpayers may not know how much the premiums cost. Taxpayers then may not take the credit or they may not report the correct information to IRS. Currently, health insurance premium deductions may appear on payment vouchers, but employers are not required to provide year-end summaries. In addition, the participating health insurance provider is not required to submit yearly summaries of contributions to either IRS or the taxpayer.

There are provisions to coordinate the new credit with other health-related deductions. Those taxpayers who itemize deductions must reduce their health insurance premium deduction by the amount of the credit. This reduction is not likely to pose a problem for most eligible taxpayers because few of them itemize, Only about 6 percent of those taxpayers with an adjusted gross income (AGI) of less than \$20,000 itemized in 1988, and only about 3 percent of eligible taxpayers claimed a deduction for medical expenses.

There are also provisions to reduce the self-employed health insurance deduction by the health insurance tax credit, but this offset is problematic. Self-employed taxpayers who claim both the health insurance credit and the self-employed deduction are required to reduce their deductible health insurance premiums by the amount of the credit.

Calculating both the deduction and the credit is a problem because both numbers are dependent on each other. Specifically, the deduction is used to calculate AGI, which then is used to determine eligibility for the credit. This credit then is used to reduce the premium used to compute the deduction, which will increase AGI—thereby potentially affecting eligibility of the credit once again.

There are a number of ways to solve this administrative problem and simplify procedures for the self-employed taxpayer. One way would require that taxpayers either claim the deduction or take the credit. If they claim the 25-percent health insurance deduction, then they would not qualify for the credit. Thus, the need to recompute AGI for qualifying purposes would be eliminated. If they do not claim the deduction, then they should be able to receive the health insurance tax credit. A second alternative, which would probably be more expensive to the Department of the Treasury, would disregard the health insurance credit offset to the self-employed deduction in calculating AGI.

We have not completed a thorough analysis of these alternatives or attempted to determine their relative benefits and costs. Treasury is aware of this problem and has proposed a technical correction for congressional consideration. Treasury's proposal eliminates the problem mentioned above. Although taxpayers would still have to offset the self-employed deduction with the credit and recompute the AGI, they would not have to recompute the credit.

We discussed these issues with IRS officials, who generally agreed with our presentation.

A copy of this fact sheet is being sent to the Commissioner of Internal Revenue and other interested parties, and we are making copies available to others upon request.

Major contributors to this report are listed in appendix III. If you have any questions concerning the above information please call me on (202) 272-7904.

Paul L. Posner

Associate Director, Tax Policy and Administration Issues

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# Appendix I Schedule EIC

SCHEDULE EIC	E	arned	Incom	e Cred	dit		OMB No.	1545-XXXX
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If You Want the IRS To n most cases, the IRS ca	-				the Credit Yoursel		:f 4b - 10	
meet the conditions explainstructions and you want Part III below.	ined on page 19 of the F	orm 104	10 fi	gure it for xplained or	t to figure the credit of you because you do not page 19 of the Fo	not m rm 104	eet the cond Dinstruction	ditions
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3 If you had health ins	urance that covered at le	ast one	of your qu	ualifying cl	hildren:			
	of your insurance comp							
b Then, enter the total	amount you paid in 1991	for that h	nealth insu	rance. (Se	e the instructions.)	3b		
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For Paperwork Reduction A					No. 17154N		le EIC (Form	

	edule EIC (Form 1040) 1991		Page 2	•	
	art IV Figure Your Earned Income Credit	,		-	
1	Enter the amount from Form 1040, line 7. If you received a taxable scholarship or fellowship grant, see page 46 for the amount to enter	4		_	
5	If you received any <b>nontaxable earned income</b> (such as military housing and subsistence allowances), enter the total of that income on line 5. Also list type and amount here ▶	5			
		6 7			
	Caution: If the amount on line 7 is \$21,250 or more, STOP HERE. You cannot take the earned income credit. But if you received any nontexable earned income, enter "NO" on Form 1040, line 56.  Enter the amount from Form 1040, line 32	8			
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9	Use the amount on line 7 to look up your credit in TABLE A that begins on page 47. Then, enter the credit here				
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### Table B—Health Insurance Credit

### 1991 Earned Income Credit TABLE B—Health Insurance Credit

Caution: This is not a tax table.

To find your health insurance credit: First, read down the "At least—But less than" columns and find the line that includes the amount you entered on line 7 or line 8 of Schedule EIC. Next, read across and find the credit. Then, enter the credit on Schedule EIC. line 13 or line 15, whichever applies.

If the amount on Schedule EIC, line 7 or line 8, is—		Your health insurance credit	sith line 7 or Jurance line 8, is		health Insurance	if the amount on Schedule EIC, line 7 or tine 8, is—		Your health insurance credit	if the amount on Schedule EIC, line 7 or line 8, is—		health insurance	If the amount on Schedule EIC, line 7 or line 8, is—		health insurance
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100 150		8 11	3,700 3,750	3,750 3,800	221 224 227	11,400 11,450	11,450 11,500	421 419	15,000 15,050	15,050 15,100	267 264	18,600 18,650	18,650 18,700	112 110
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400 450	450	26 29	4,000 4,060	4,050 4,100	242	11,700 11,750	11,750 11,800	408 406	15,300 15,350	15,350 15,400	254	18,900 18,950	18,950 19,000	100
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2,000 2,050	2.050 2,100	122 125	5,600 5,650	5,650 5,700	338 341	13,300 13,350	13,350 13,400	339 337	16,900 16,950	16,950 17,000	185 183	20,500 20,550	20.550 20.600	31 29
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2,200		134 137	5,800 5,850	5,850 5,900	350 353	13,500 13,550	13,550	331	17,100	17,150	177 175	20,700	20,750	22 20
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2,750	2,850	167	6,350	6,400 6,450	383 386	14,050	14,100	307	17,650	17,700	153 151			
2,850 2,900	2,950	173 178	6,450 6,500	6,500 6,550	389 392	14,150 14,200	14,200 14,250	303 301	17,750 17,800	17,800 17,850	149 147		0 or more take the	
2.950 3.000	3,050	179	6,550	6,600	395 398	14,250	14,300	299	17,850	17,900	145			2.001
3,050 3,100	3,100 3,150	185 188	6,650 6,700	6,700 6,750	401 404	14,350	14,400	294 292	17,950	18,000	140 138			
3,150	3,200	191	6,750 6,800	6,800	407 410	14,450	14,500	290	18,050	18,100	136			
3,250 3,250 3,300	3,300	197	6,850 6,900	6,900 6,950	410 413 416	14,500 14,550 14,600	14,550 14,600	288 286	18,100 18,150	18,150 18,200	134 132 130	1		
3,350	3,400	203	6,950	7,000	419	14,850	14,650 14,700	284 282	18,200 18,250	18,250 18,300	127	]		
3,400		206 209	7,000 7,050	7,050 7,100	422 425	14,700 14,750	14,750 14,800	279 277	18,300 18,350	18,350 18,400	125 123			
3,500 3,550	3,550 3,600	212 215	7,100 11,250	11,250 11,300	428 427	14,800 14,850	14,850 14,900	275 273	18,400 18,450	18,450 18,500	121 119			

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