

What a Chapter President Needs to Know in Case a Member Dies

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From time to time chapter presidents need to deal with the unfortunate fact that a member dies. There are benefits which apply to all teachers and others which apply only to CTA/NEA members that are often unknown to the teacher or his/her family. The chapter president is often the person in the best position to assist the family with these benefits in the days and weeks following the death of a member. The following information is provided as a guideline for chapter presidents regarding the various death benefits that may be available to the family of the deceased CTA member.

1) CTA Death and Dismemberment Plan

CTA members* in an eligible class qualify for a death benefit provided by the CTA Economic Benefits Trust. The benefit for death by natural causes is an amount that increases with continuous years of CTA membership up to a maximum of \$2,000. As additional protection, the plan includes an additional accidental death and dismemberment benefit up to \$10,000. Furthermore, the plan also provides a \$50,000 benefit for a covered accident or assault that occurs while the member is actively engaged in his or her occupation or while acting in the capacity of an Association Leader**. No premium payments are required to be eligible for these benefits. Beneficiary forms are available from the CTA Member Benefits Department (see contact information below). Death benefits must be filed within one (1) year of the date of death while accidental death and dismemberment claims must be filed within six (6) months from the date of the accidental loss.

2) NEA Dues-Tab Insurance

Eligible NEA members*** qualify for a death benefit called *NEA Dues Tab* by virtue of their NEA membership. No additional premiums are required to receive this benefit. The benefit for death by natural causes is an amount that increases with continuous years of NEA membership, to a maximum of \$1,000. If death is caused by an accident or assault, the benefit payable is an amount equal to five (5) times the amount of NEA dues paid to NEA, up to \$5,000. Furthermore, if death is caused by an accident or assault which occurs while the member is engaged in his or her occupation or occurs while the eligible member is acting on association business in the capacity of an Association Leader, the benefit payable is \$50,000.

* Eligible member of CTA means a person in good standing in CTA membership categories 1, 2a, 2b, 3, Student-CTA, or NEA Education Support Personnel in categories 1, 2, 3, or 4 (NEA-ESP).

** Association Leader is a CTA member who is serving in an official capacity for CTA, a local chartered affiliate of CTA, or the National Education Association.

*** All active (including life active), staff and reserve members who are actively employed in the field of education and are members in good standing with their state association are eligible for the NEA Dues-Tab program.

NEA recently implemented the following enhancements to the NEA Dues-Tab as follows: Effective February 16, 2001, if death is caused by an unlawful homicide which occurs while the eligible member is engaged in his or her occupation, the benefit payable is \$150,000 instead of \$50,000. Furthermore, NEA retired members, only while acting on association business in the capacity of an Association Leader, are eligible only for the \$50,000 accidental death and dismemberment benefit.

Beneficiary forms are available from NEA (see contact information below). Please remind all CTA/NEA members about the importance of periodically updating the beneficiary designation forms for both the CTA Death and Dismemberment Plan and the NEA Dues-Tab. The existence of completed beneficiary forms expedites the payment of claims.

3) CTA Voluntary Life Insurance Plan

CTA members have the option to enroll in a level-term life insurance plan ranging from \$25,000 to \$400,000 or a decreasing-term life insurance plan. UnumProvident (see address below) underwrites this plan and premiums are paid through payroll deduction. To find out whether the deceased member was covered under this plan, refer to his or her pay stubs to determine whether payroll deductions were made for this policy. Additionally, suggest that the member's survivors verify coverage by contacting UnumProvident and have the member's social security number available for identification. If the member is covered by the plan, UnumProvident will forward a death claim form to the beneficiary. The claim form must be completed and returned to UnumProvident along with a death certificate.

4) CTA Voluntary Disability Insurance Plan

The CTA Voluntary Disability Insurance Plan provides a \$10,000 accidental death and dismemberment benefit for loss of life and dismemberment resulting from an accident. UnumProvident underwrites this plan and premiums are paid through payroll deduction. To find out whether the deceased member was covered under this plan, refer to his or her pay stub to determine whether payroll deductions were made for this policy. Additionally, suggest that the member's survivors verify coverage by contacting UnumProvident and have the member's social security number available for identification. If the member is covered by the plan, UnumProvident will forward a death claim form to the beneficiary. The claim form must be completed and returned to UnumProvident along with a death certificate.

5) District-Paid Life Insurance Plan

Under the terms of certain Collective Bargaining Agreements, there may also be a district-paid life insurance policy provided to bargaining unit members. For those chapters that have bargained such a benefit, there will generally be an individual in Benefits Administration at the district office to serve as the contact person to expedite the process of applying for that insurance payout.

6) Other Voluntary Life Insurance Plans

Please advise the member's survivors to examine the most recent pay stubs of the deceased member to determine if the member had been making regular voluntary payroll deductions to maintain other insurance policies, of which the spouse may not have been aware. Each such policy needs to be examined to determine applicability.

7) Tax-Deferred Annuity Plans

In general, tax-deferred annuity plans provide a death benefit whereby the member's contributions to the plan or the account value, whichever is greater, is paid to the member's beneficiary. Since contributions are made through payroll deductions, once again, please advise the member's survivors to examine the most recent pay stubs of the deceased member to determine if the member had been making regular voluntary payroll deductions to a tax-deferred annuity plan. If so, the member's survivors should contact the annuity provider for a claim form. Payment will be made to the member's designated beneficiary.

8) Other Pay

School districts typically issue salary paychecks for certificated employees monthly. Although regular pay for an employee ceases at the time of death, the spouse or estate of the deceased may be entitled to collect a special paycheck for the elapsed workdays of the last month.

Applications for payments under any of the five (5) paragraphs above will require, in addition to the completion of certain forms, a certified copy of a death certificate. Generally, photocopies are not accepted. It may be that copies can be obtained from either the attending physician or the funeral home that handled post mortem arrangements. If not, then copies of death certificates are usually available from the Vital Records Division of your county's Health Department. Each certificate will cost around \$11. The family of the deceased may want to consider obtaining additional certified copies for other purposes, such as other insurance policies, probate, and so forth.

In addition to the insurance guidelines listed above, the following helpful suggestions and resources are provided:

- Check the State Teachers Retirement System (STRS) website (www.calstrs.ca.gov) for details concerning member death. Many variations exist in plans for STRS benefits paid to survivors. Most of these depend upon choices made by the STRS member prior to death.

The named beneficiary, if any, of a STRS member is entitled to receive a lump sum death benefit. If the deceased has been a STRS member for less than one year, their beneficiary will receive a "refund" consisting of the entire member's contributions to STRS, plus interest. (This sum will *not* include the district's contributions.) If the deceased had been a STRS member for more than one year, the beneficiary will receive a death benefit of

around \$5,493 (for members enrolled in Coverage A) or \$21,974 (for members enrolled in Coverage B). The STRS Board adjusts these amounts periodically.

Work with the Benefits Administration branch of your district office to assist the family of the deceased in obtaining their STRS benefits.

- Some family members may also be eligible for Social Security benefits if the teacher performed work covered by Social Security. A lump sum death benefit of \$255 is payable to a spouse or to a child eligible to receive a survivor benefit. Surviving children may be eligible for an ongoing benefit based on the number of quarters the teacher worked under Social Security and the amount of the teacher's Social Security contributions. The Social Security Administration (SSA) web site (www.ssa.gov) has more information.
- Many chapter members are unaware that medical, dental, and other such fringe benefits may no longer be provided to the spouse or dependents of deceased district employees, beginning with the month immediately following the member's death. (Chapters may wish to explore bargaining contract language which ameliorates this disturbing fact.) Under the COBRA statute, districts must allow continuing medical fringe benefits to be purchased by the spouse for a period of around three years. This can be a costly proposition. Under current law, a school district must send the member's survivors a notice informing of the right to continue certain health insurance coverage within sixty (60) days of the qualifying event (i.e. death of the member). The member's survivors then have forty-five (45) days from the date of the notice to decide to continue the health coverage offered under COBRA.

It would be a good idea to inform your members about the information in this paper through periodic newsletter articles.

Below are relevant telephone numbers and contact information, which should customarily be provided to the spouse of a deceased teacher:

Name	Telephone Number	Website/E-Mail Address
CTA Member Benefits	650-552-5200	Member_benefits@cta.org
NEA Member Benefits	800-637-4636	www.neamb.com
Unum Provident	800-282-4049	www.unum.enrollcta
Tax Deferred Annuity Provider	Fill in number here	Fill in website address here
Cal STRS	800-228-5453	www.calstrs.ca.gov
Social Security Administration	800-772-1213	www.ssa.gov
School District Benefit Dept	Fill in number here	Fill in website address here
School District Personnel Dept	Fill in number here	Fill in website address here
County Health Department	Fill in number here	Fill in website address here
Chapter President	Fill in number here	Fill in website address here

The Standard
 (Life & Disability Insurance)
 www.cta.org/mycta
 ★ 800-522-0406