Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Statement to Health Policy Commission

BOSTON, Oct. 20, 2020 /PRNewswire/ -- Andrew Dreyfus, President and CEO of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, gave the following statement today during the Massachusetts Health Policy Commission's Health Care Cost Trends Hearing, COVID-19 and the MA Health Care System: Assessing Impact, Advancing Equity:

"Good morning, Chair Altman, Commissioners, and fellow panelists. My name is Andrew Dreyfus, and I am president and CEO of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

I will briefly cover three topics:

- Our response to COVID-19
- Diversity, inclusion and health inequities
- Health care affordability

COVID RESPONSE
When the pandemic hit our state, Blue Cross acted immediately to balance the urgent needs of our nearly three million members, employer customers, clinical partners and the community.

We waived cost shares for medically necessary COVID-19 testing and treatment and covered all in-network medical and mental health visits via telehealth at no cost to members. We broadened access to mental health services, including permanently paying for behavioral health telehealth visits at in-person rates and increasing reimbursement for child psychiatry.

We acted swiftly to help our most vulnerable members. We created a COVID Risk Index to identify members at highest risk for contracting the virus and experiencing severe symptoms. We used zip codes and socioeconomic status to prioritize outreach in COVID hot spots. To date, our nurse case managers have reached out to 37,000 at risk members.

To support employers, we provided $100 million in premium relief, extended grace periods, helped provide coverage to furloughed workers, and have held webinars for 10,000 participants on issues ranging from mental health to racial disparities.

We supported providers by suspending administrative requirements, advancing payments, and creating a new value-based payment program for independent primary care practices, to improve quality, lower costs, and provide financial support during the pandemic.

Finally, we responded to the needs of our neighbors. Our employees worked at the Boston Hope field hospital, and with the Department of Public Health as contact tracers, and we have donated tens of thousands of meals from our company kitchens. Through our Foundation and company, we have made more than $10 million in direct contributions to the community in the fight against COVID.

DIVERSITY, INCLUSION AND HEALTH INEQUITY
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts has long been a leader in diversity and inclusion. More than half of our Board and senior leaders are women and people of color. We work hard to ensure that our entire workforce feels respected, included and empowered, and the passion of our diverse employees helps drive our commitment to racial equity. Our supplier diversity program procures products and services from minority, women, veteran, LGBT, and disability-owned businesses. Our company made a $1 million grant to the New Commonwealth Racial Equity and Social Justice Fund.

But we must do much more. COVID has reinforced the racism that pervades our health care system – just as racism afflicts nearly all aspects of our society – and taken a disproportionate toll on Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities. The causes of health disparities and inequity are deep and include such social determinants of health as poverty, housing, education, nutrition, and racial bias. Our company and Foundation have worked on these issues for two decades, but we have renewed our commitment this year, pledging to join others to fight racial inequities in health care.

We plan to gather new data from our members, work with health care providers to understand patterns of inequities and introduce targeted incentives and enhanced support to reduce disparities. We recognize that addressing health inequities will require the trust of our members and accounts, and we look forward to working with the HPC and CHIA in close collaboration with other payers, providers, the community and government.

HEALTH CARE VALUE AND AFFORDABILITY

While the Commonwealth appropriately focuses on COVID and racial inequity, we cannot lose sight of the urgent need for affordable health care. We are seeing a worrying rise in the underlying cost of health care, driven in part by increases in prices sought by hospitals, physicians, and pharmaceutical companies. If we are to effectively fight the pandemic and racial injustice, we must work to make health care more affordable for the public programs and private employers and individuals who pay for care.

Finally, I understand that this may be Chairman Altman's last hearing. Stuart: you have brought great credibility and integrity to the work of the Health Policy Commission. The Commonwealth owes you an enormous debt of gratitude.

Thank you."

About Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (bluecrossma.com) is a community-focused, tax-paying, not-for-profit health plan headquartered in Boston. We are committed to the relentless pursuit of quality, affordable health care *with* an unparalleled consumer experience. Consistent with our promise to always put our members first, we are rated among the nation's best health plans for member satisfaction and quality. Connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and LinkedIn.

SOURCE Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts

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