Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Contributes $25 Million To Help Local Health Care Organizations Address Racial And Ethnic Inequities In Patient Care

BOSTON, Dec. 2, 2021 /PRNewswire/ -- Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (Blue Cross) today announced it will contribute $25 million to support local health care organizations in their efforts to eliminate racial and ethnic inequities in care. The contribution is the latest step in the company's plans, announced in September, to partner with the medical community to address disparities.

"We know these changes can't be made overnight," said Andrew Dreyfus, Blue Cross' president and CEO. "Addressing deep-rooted inequities requires significant time, energy and staff resources. We recognize that and want to support our clinical partners in this important work, since we all stand to benefit from a more equitable health care system."

The $25 million in funding will be distributed by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) via grants to physician practices and hospitals to assist in their equity improvement efforts and help them prepare for the rollout of new contracts with financial incentives linked to progress in addressing inequities starting in 2023.

"This funding will provide much-needed support to interdisciplinary teams who are actively working to improve health equity through improvements to race and ethnicity data collection practices and focused interventions that can improve clinical conditions," said Kedar Mate, MD, President and CEO of IHI. "We are proud to work with Blue Cross on this effort to incorporate equity measures into payment models, and we encourage other health plans to follow their lead."

"We want to help clinicians determine the best ways to improve the equity of care their patients receive and then act to make improvements," said Dr. Mark Friedberg, senior vice president for performance measurement & improvement at Blue Cross. "For some organizations, that might mean developing core equity measurement capabilities—for example, by upgrading their data on patient race and ethnicity. For others, that might mean making targeted investments, for example in language capabilities or implementing condition-targeted programs to improve the equity of care for patients with high blood pressure or diabetes."

In keeping with a commitment announced earlier this year to act as a leader in addressing health inequities, Blue Cross reviewed 2019 administrative and health data from more than 1.3 million Massachusetts members and identified racial disparities that, in many cases, represent lower-quality care for Black, Asian, and Hispanic members on 48 industry-standard measures that Blue Cross tracks as part of its ongoing quality assurance operations. The data are now accessible to the public at https://www.bluecrossma.org/myblue/equity-in-health-care/health-equity-report.

"Blue Cross has made a laudable commitment," said Dr. Thea James, vice president of mission, executive director of the health equity accelerator and associate chief medical officer at Boston Medical Center. "It facilitates intent toward change, and measurable outcomes that are rooted in equity. It is impressive."

Blue Cross invites members to share information about their race, ethnicity, and preferred language when they log into the company's member portal, MyBlue. Knowing more about its 2.8 million members will help Blue Cross do its part to create a better, more equitable health system.

About Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (www.bluecrossma.org) is a community-focused, tax-paying, not-for-profit health plan headquartered in Boston. We are committed to the relentless pursuit of quality, affordable and equitable 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.

About the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI)
The Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) is an independent not-for-profit organization based in Boston, Mass. For 30 years, IHI has used improvement science to advance and sustain better outcomes in health and health systems across the world. IHI brings awareness of safety and quality to millions, catalyzes learning and the systematic improvement of care, develops solutions to previously intractable challenges, and mobilizes health systems, communities, regions, and nations to reduce harm and deaths. IHI collaborates with a growing community to spark bold, inventive ways to improve the health of individuals and populations. IHI generates optimism, harvests fresh ideas, and supports anyone, anywhere who wants to profoundly change health and health care for the better. Learn more at ihi.org.

SOURCE Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts

For further information: Amy McHugh, amy.mchugh@bcbsma.com, 617-246-2311