Blue Cross Members with Advanced Illnesses Will Receive Enhanced Benefits to Improve Their Quality of Life

BOSTON — December 17, 2015 —Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (Blue Cross) today announced the launch of a comprehensive program aimed at improving quality-of-life for individuals and families facing advanced illnesses and the end of life.

“Nothing is more personal and difficult than the decisions people have to make when they face an advanced illness,” said Andrew Dreyfus, Blue Cross President and CEO. “Our new *Complete Care for Advanced Illness* program is designed to enhance patient-clinician communication during those critical times and to support high-quality, compassionate care that honors people’s values and preferences.”

Beginning in 2016, Blue Cross will:

- Expand coverage for conversations between members and their clinicians about planning for advanced illness and end-of-life care. Blue Cross already pays medical providers for having these conversations and, as of January 1, 2016, will also pay behavioral health providers in recognition of the important role they can play in facilitating difficult discussions.
- Support increased education and training on how to prepare for advanced illness and end-of-life care, with initiatives aimed at Blue Cross members, their families, and the clinicians who care for them.
- Enhance member benefits to encourage earlier and expanded use of hospice care.
- Introduce a new program to help members with advanced illness receive high-quality palliative care for the prevention and relief of suffering, in their own homes. The program is being developed with input from clinicians and patients and families.

Research has shown that timely advanced illness care, with a strong emphasis on patient-clinician communication, can result in: better quality of life and satisfaction as reported by patients and families; better coping by bereaved family members; care that is more aligned with a patients’ wishes; a greater likelihood of remaining safely at home; and even some increase in survival time.

Blue Cross also announced that it is partnering with Ariadne Labs, which has developed a new, patient-centered, systematic approach to improving communication between critically ill patients and their clinicians through its *Serious Illness Care Program*. The non-profit research group’s executive director, Atul Gawande, MD, MPH, explained: “A key part of our mission is to improve the lives of people with advanced illness by encouraging more, earlier, and better conversations about their values and priorities for their care. The support we’re getting from Blue Cross will help broaden the scope of our program by introducing it to thousands of doctors and other clinical professionals who care for Blue Cross members.”

In keeping with its multifaceted approach, Blue Cross is also collaborating with physicians and researchers to design measures for monitoring the quality of advanced illness planning and patient care and will offer courses on care planning and communication to its 3,600 employees through partnerships with The Conversation Project and Honoring Choices Massachusetts.

Blue Cross CEO Andrew Dreyfus noted that Massachusetts has led the nation in expanding access to health care coverage, reforming the way doctors and hospitals are paid, and setting statewide goals for health care spending, and said he thinks advanced illness care offers a similar opportunity. “Our program is designed to help individuals with advanced illness receive high-quality care that honors priorities and preferences, and to lessen the burden on critically ill patients and their families,” he said. “Many other organizations and individuals in our state are working toward the same goals, and I believe that our efforts, collectively, could make Massachusetts a national model.”

About Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (www.bluecrossma.com) is a community-focused, tax-paying, not-for-profit health plan headquartered in Boston. We are the trusted health plan for more than 30,000 Massachusetts employers and are committed to working with others in a spirit of shared responsibility to make quality health care affordable. Consistent with our corporate promise to always put our 2.8 million 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 Ariadne Labs
Ariadne Labs is a global leader in health systems innovation, fostering a new discipline of research and discovery for better patient care from birth to the end of life. A joint center of Brigham & Women’s Hospital and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, Ariadne Labs develops simple, high-impact and scalable solutions to addresses failures in health care systems at the most critical moments in people’s lives everywhere. Our tools and programs for childbirth, surgery, and serious illness are demonstrating massive impact and worldwide spread.

About The Conversation Project
The Conversation Project, co-founded by Pulitzer Prize-winner Ellen Goodman and launched in collaboration with the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI), and our Founding Funder, The Cambia Health Foundation, is a public engagement campaign with a goal that is both simple and transformative: to have every person's wishes for end-of-life care expressed and respected. Too many people die in a manner they would not choose, and too many of their loved ones are left feeling bereaved, guilty, and uncertain. The Conversation Project offers people the tools, guidance, and resources they need to begin talking with their loved ones about their wishes and preferences, before a medical crisis - "at the kitchen table," not in the intensive care unit. For more information, visit theconversationproject.org.

About Honoring Choices Massachusetts
Honoring Choices Massachusetts is a consumer-focused, nonprofit organization that provides health care planning information and Massachusetts planning tools to inform and empower adults, 18 years old and older, to make a health care plan and connect to person-centered care in their community. Working in collaboration with partners across the Commonwealth, our shared mission is to help adults and families promote their everyday wellness, to plan for the future, and to receive quality care that honors their choices all through their lives.

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