MENTAL HEALTH VISITS DOUBLED SINCE START OF PANDEMIC, BLUE CROSS BLUE SHIELD OF MASSACHUSETTS DATA REVEALS

State's leading health plan expands care options to meet unprecedented demand

BOSTON, Nov. 30, 2022 /PRNewswire/ -- New data released today by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts ("Blue Cross") show Blue Cross members' use of in-person and virtual visits for mental health care have increased 100% since 2019.[i] The findings mirror national trends that have found rising demand for treatment for depression and anxiety disorders.[ii]

"As the need for mental health services continues to grow, access to convenient and affordable care is critical," said Andrew Dreyfus, Blue Cross' president and CEO. "By expanding and diversifying our mental health network, we're ensuring that our members are able to find and receive the high-quality care they need, when they need it."

Blue Cross' mental health provider network has grown by nearly 46% over the last five years and now includes nearly 18,000 clinicians.

In response to the unprecedented demand for mental health care, Blue Cross today announced the further expansion of its mental health provider network. The not-for-profit health plan is partnering with several national mental health provider groups to increase the number of clinicians available to members and provide specialized services for specific mental health care needs.

Expanding primary mental health groups

Talkiatry, a national primary mental health provider focused on telehealth psychiatric therapy, in-person therapy and medication management, is now in the Blue Cross network.

Talkiatry joins a range of other primary mental health groups that offer therapy and medication management to treat a broad array of mental health conditions and provide support to Blue Cross members. Earlier this year, Blue Cross partnered with Thriveworks, Headway, Refresh Mental Health and Valera Health, which offer both in-person and virtual treatment with diverse clinicians serving most ages.

Blue Cross will continue to expand its network to include more national virtual mental health groups in 2023.

Adding sub-specialty partnerships

Blue Cross is adding to its network two specialty mental health provider organizations that provide care for specific conditions and populations: And Still We Rise, which provides mental health care promoting culturally affirming practices, and DynamiCare, which helps people quit or moderate their use of alcohol, drugs and tobacco.

They join specialty providers already in the Blue Cross network, including NOCD and Forge Health. Blue Cross will also continue to offer specialty mental health services through its partners Aware Recovery Care and Brightline.

"It's not enough to simply expand our network with more clinicians," said Dr. Greg Harris, a psychiatrist and senior medical director for mental health at Blue Cross. "We want to ensure we have the right clinicians to treat members' specific needs – and that includes specialized treatment and approaches. When it comes to mental health treatment, one size does not fit all. We're committed to building a network of practitioners to serve a diverse array of needs for children, adolescents and adults."

In coming months, Blue Cross plans to add to its network specialty mental health provider groups focused on severe eating disorders and autism.

Blue Cross will continue to support mental health care options by reimbursing telehealth sessions performed by mental health specialists at the same rate as in-person visits. This includes both video and telephonic telehealth services.

Other mental health resources

Blue Cross is deeply committed to supporting the mental health of its members, customers, employees and the community. The company is known for its innovative approach to mental health and substance use disorder, including an in-house staff of clinicians and specially trained mental health case managers.

The company's Mental Health Resource Center is designed to help members better understand their mental health care options, find clinicians, and explore self-guided tools for managing stress, anxiety, depression and insomnia. Blue Cross also offers exclusive member discounts on classes that support mindfulness and wellness, including yoga and meditation.

Blue Cross' health news site, Coverage, publishes articles and videos aimed at combating mental health stigma and highlighting resources for treatment.

Members who need assistance finding mental health and/or substance use support options can call Blue Cross' dedicated mental health line at **(888) 389-7764**. Representatives help guide members to the right support and, in some cases, help locate appropriate clinicians who are accepting new patients and even assist with setting up the first visit.

About Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (http://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.

[i] In 2019, Blue Cross reported approximately 4 million behavioral health visits. In Q3 2022, Blue Cross reported approximately 8 million behavioral health visits.
[ii] https://www.apa.org/pubs/reports/practitioner/2022-covid-psychologist-workload

SOURCE Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts

For further information: Kelsey Pearse, kelsey.pearse@bcbsma.com