

EXPANDING ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH CARE ACROSS AMERICA



The U.S. is facing a mental health crisis, worsened by the COVID 19 pandemic. Sixty million Americans struggle with a mental health condition, but less than half receive treatment. There are several reasons for this, most pressingly workforce shortages exacerbated by the pandemic. [Nearly half of Americans](#) live in a federally designated mental health professional workforce shortage area. The shortage is particularly acute for [children and adolescents](#).

Blue Cross and Blue Shield companies are committed to confronting and addressing inequities in mental health care while rigorously prioritizing the focus areas that will have the biggest impact:

1. **Address the youth mental health crisis**
2. **Ensuring equitable access to mental health care**
3. **Improving care integration of physical and mental health**
4. **Confronting the unacceptable racial inequities in mental health**

EXPANDING ACCESS AND PURSUING INNOVATIVE WAYS TO DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY MENTAL HEALTH CARE ACROSS THE COUNTRY

FOCUSING ON YOUTH EARLY INTERVENTION AND CRISIS RESPONSE

These facts paint a stark picture of the state of youth mental health in the U.S.: a growing percentage of young people are living with major depression; suicide is the second leading cause of death among people ages 10 – 34; and more than half of young people with major depression do not receive any treatment. Early identification and crisis intervention are critical. BCBSA companies are using technology and strategic partnerships to help stem the crisis. **BCBSA recommends that policymakers fund youth mental health training and education for school staff and students to increase early identification of child and adolescent behavioral health conditions and increase our understanding of the impacts of social determinants of health.**

Independence 

[Independence Blue Cross is working with Quartet Health](#) to connect patients to mental health solutions that fit their preferences, match their clinical needs, accept their insurance and link with the rest of their health care experience. Quartet Health's SmartMatch technology also fosters collaboration between a patient's behavioral health provider and referring provider to help them get the support and treatment they need.

 Arkansas
BlueCross BlueShield

Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield's Blue & You Foundation has invested in a University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences [program that trains school teachers and administrators](#) to prepare for, respond to and recover from traumatic events affecting students and connect them to resources. More than 2,100 teachers have already been trained statewide.

INVESTING IN PROVIDERS TO INTEGRATE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH CARE

Practice models that integrate physical and mental health care, such as the Collaborative Care model, have been [shown](#) to improve outcomes for patients with depression, anxiety and chronic physical conditions. Integrated care improves access to mental health care as clinicians are more readily available to patients, often embedded in primary care settings. Many BCBS companies are already advancing this powerful model of care. **In addition to supporting integrated payment models, BCBSA also recommends that policymakers provide resources to support primary care providers with mental health management.**



BCBSM has implemented the collaborative care model designation program. BCBS Michigan's CoCM integrates psychiatric consultants and behavioral health case managers into primary care settings.

BCBS MI invests in initial training, ongoing education and hands-on support for practices new to the model and rewards providers as they deliver CoCM. It is currently delivered in 180 practices representing more than 800 providers, to more than 5,000 unique members. Early participants have seen 23% of enrolled patients experience remission from depression within six months and 32% of enrolled patients experienced remission from anxiety within six months. Additionally, BCBS MI's practices are using CoCM in the pediatric population and is exploring CoCM delivery in obstetrics and substance use disorder settings.

MITIGATING THE IMPACT OF WORKFORCE SHORTAGES

The U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [reports](#) the nation is short more than four million behavioral health providers. This crosses all subspecialties, including child psychiatrists, social workers and more. BCBS companies are focused on increasing capacity. **BCBSA recommends that policymakers address workforce shortages by promoting integration of behavioral health care into primary care and promoting use of non-clinical support personnel.**



BCSBTN and the Tennessee Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (TNAPP) created Behaviorally Effective Healthcare in Pediatrics (BEHIP), a collaborative training project for Pediatric Primary Care providers. The program supports pediatricians in treating less complex mental health needs, helping to alleviate the shortage of child psychiatrists and other mental health providers.



BCBS Wyoming and BCBS South Carolina are investing in programs that empower college students interested in entering the field of youth mental health, as well as parents, teachers and student peers to provide additional support to young people in crisis and close gaps in care.

EXPANDING ACCESS TO TELEHEALTH

The pandemic revealed the high demand for mental health care, and telehealth has been a literal lifeline for many. According to the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#), telehealth can not only eliminate barriers to access to care such as a lack of transportation but increase access to culturally competent providers or other specialties. BCBS companies have added telehealth options across the country. **BCBSA recommends that policymakers support expanded access to telehealth for behavioral health through reducing these barriers and ensuring flexibility in coverage. Policymakers could remove in-person visit requirements and geographic and originating site requirements, among other supportive policies.**



MASSACHUSETTS

BCBS Massachusetts engaged Brightline Health as an in-network provider for children ages 3-17 and their parents. Brightline provides live online child psychiatry, psychotherapy and family support. The service addresses the need for wraparound care and bridges the gap in access to children's mental health care professionals.



Rural Americans are often hit hardest by the shortage of mental health professionals. **Regence** health plans have expanded telehealth access across their largely rural footprints in Washington, Idaho, Oregon and Utah. With Talkspace, Regence members have access to more than 3,000 licensed mental health professionals. From the convenience of home, they can receive 24/7 support via secure messaging and live video sessions. For members with substance use disorders, [Boulder Care brings in-network access](#) to virtual addiction treatment, as well as long-term support to address social drivers of health such as stable housing and employment. Members are paired with a clinician, care advocate and peer coach for wraparound care.