Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Expands Its Comprehensive Behavioral Health and Substance Abuse Programs

BOSTON — August 25, 2014 — Identifying and finding help for mental health and substance abuse problems can sometimes be challenging. Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (BCBSMA) makes available numerous resources to assist members in getting the treatment they need.

"Our focus is always on assuring timely access to quality care that makes a difference in people's lives," said Dr. John Fallon, Chief Physician Executive and Senior Vice President of BCBSMA. "It's time for a broad, community conversation about the importance of behavioral health and its overall impact on health and wellness. One of the first - and most important steps - we must take as a society is to overcome the stigma still associated with mental illness and substance abuse so that people who need care are not afraid to seek it."

Recognizing and Coping with Behavioral Health Issues

Behavioral health is as essential to a person's overall well-being as ones physical health. Many might be surprised to know that mental health conditions are more common than one might think - depression, substance abuse, stress and anxiety - just to name a few. About 42.5 million American adults annually (roughly 18 percent of all U.S. adults) suffer from some form of behavioral or mental health disorder according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

"Life can be challenging at times," said Dr. Ken Duckworth, Medical Director for Behavioral Health at BCBSMA. "People cope very differently with obstacles - often impacting their mental health. One of our highest priorities at Blue Cross is the health and wellbeing of our members which is why we have a comprehensive and integrated Behavioral Health Program and are introducing new tools to support our members through their entire continuum of care."

New BCBSMA Behavioral Health Programs and Initiatives:

- **OneHealth**: A mobile and online platform that provides Blue Cross members and their families with 24/7 structured peer support, education and tools to aide in the recovery from substance abuse. This voluntary, leading edge program uses engaging social media communication tools and real-time programs to monitor emotional states, and provide the type of safe and anonymous peer support we know helps in maintaining sobriety.
- **REACH** [Recovery Education & Access to Community Health]: Developed in partnership with Beacon Health Strategies, REACH is designed to improve care for certain members with serious mental illness or substance abuse issues who typically have difficulty engaging in traditional care plans. It provides focused care plan development and management, active coordination of behavioral health and medical services, as well as community-based, flexible supports to promote independent living such as peer support, life skills training, family support groups, and other support services such as transportation to and from health care appointments.
- **Life Balance**: Developed in concert with researchers at Brigham & Women's Hospital, Life Balance is designed to improve health outcomes for members with mental health problems and significant health conditions. It provides one-on-one coaching to help strengthen resiliency and teach the coping skills necessary for physical and psychological balance in the face of illness.

Additional Resources:

- **Suicide Prevention**: Every year, millions of Americans are directly affected by the more than 37,000 suicides and hundreds of thousands of suicide attempts made by friends or loved ones according to the National Suicide Prevention Hotline. Yet, suicide can be preventable. If you or someone you know is contemplating suicide we encourage you to call **1-800-273-TALK (8255)** for resources in your area. To learn more about recognizing risk factors and warning signs visit www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org.
- **Risk assessment tools** on ahealthyme can help with the identification of common mental health conditions including: Stress, Depression, Prescription Drug Abuse, Drug Abuse and Alcohol Abuse. As always, it's best to consult with your doctor about any concerns.
- **Robust physician and hospital network**: BCBSMA provides access to approximately 200 health facilities and 10,000 health care providers from a range of behavioral and mental health specialties. We collaborate closely with professional societies and specialists to promote better care and coordination of services.
- **Prescription Pain Medication Safety Program**: BCBSMA instituted a new prescription safety program to reduce the risk of prescription painkiller addiction. In the first 18 months of the program, Blue Cross improved safety and quality for its members, facilitated more appropriate narcotic prescription use, lowered addiction risk for members and prevented excess pills from reaching the community.

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation Programs and Initiatives:

- **Fostering Effective Integration Grant Program**: The Foundations currently reviewing applications for its new one year grant program on behavioral health and primary care services integration. Selected organizations must have experience integrating behavioral health and primary care and participate in an assessment that will inform a longer-term Foundation

investment strategy to advance and promote promising practices.

- **City of Boston Addiction & Recovery Services Assessment**: In collaboration with Mayor Martin J. Walsh and the City of Boston, the Foundationis conducting a study of the current capacity of addiction and recovery services in Boston which should be completed by the end of 2014. It will focus on how to better align the city's addiction and recovery services with demonstrated best practices and will inform the creation of the city's first ever Office of Recovery Services. An advisory committee of local experts is being co-chaired by Mayor Walsh and Foundation President Audrey Shelto.

"The future success of continuing to improving care, while keeping care affordable, depends in large part on the very important integration of medical care and behavioral health – something we've long been focused on," continued Dr. Fallon. "Care that is better coordinated and integrated will lead to a more patient-centered and successful health care system as we've seen with our Alternative Quality Contract (AQC). Physicians within our AQC network screen patients for depression and adherence to antidepressant medications – helping to foster a total continuum of care."

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.

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