# Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Announces Bold Plan to Address Health Inequities and Racial Justice

**Announces new racial justice grants**
**First health plan in market to collect comprehensive member race & ethnicity data**
**Creates new expert panel to advise on addressing inequities**

BOSTON, Feb. 3, 2021 /PRNewswire/ -- Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts ("Blue Cross") today announced a set of bold initiatives to address health inequities and racial injustice.

The multipart plan features new charitable investments, including a grant program to support not-for-profits led by Black, Indigenous and other people of color, a first-to-market approach to collecting race and ethnicity data to address inequities in the care members receive, expanding marketing efforts to better reach a more diverse audience with critical messages focused on addressing gaps in care and improving overall health, and new investments and support for minority-owned businesses.

"As a community and a country, we are facing twin pandemics of both coronavirus and racism. Those of us in health care have a responsibility to address both. And just as we acted swiftly to respond to COVID-19, we are deepening our commitment to racial justice and to addressing long-standing inequities in health care," said Andrew Dreyfus, president and CEO. "We will continue to be a leader in creating a more equitable health care system."

The comprehensive plan announced today builds on decades of work by Blue Cross and its Foundation to address inequities in care and to advance racial and social justice.

## Charitable investments

The new $350,000 Racial Equity and Justice Grants announced today will support BIPOC-led not-for-profit organizations focused on addressing racial injustice in Massachusetts communities. Blue Cross has awarded six organizations with a two-year grant, providing $25,000 in general operating support per year, and two organizations with a one-year,$25,000 grant. Grantees also will have the opportunity to receive in pro-bono support.

The program builds on Blue Cross' existing investments, such as a recent$1 million contribution to the New Commonwealth Fund for Racial Equity and Social Justice Fund created last year by local Black and Brown executives, including Blue Cross Executive Vice President and Chief Legal Officer Stephanie Lovell and Blue Cross Board members Quincy Miller, president of Eastern Bank, and Corey Thomas, CEO of Rapid7.

The company will continue to provide additional direct financial support via charitable investments to a wide range of organizations working to advance racial equity and social justice.

## Addressing inequities in health care

Decades of research have shown people of color, in particular Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous Americans, have less access to high-quality treatment and experience poorer outcomes for a wide range of medical conditions – including COVID-19.

Blue Cross' work to address these inequities includes convening an advisory council of leading local and national experts in health inequities to help guide and shape Blue Cross' strategy from a broad range of perspectives.




Additionally, Blue Cross is:

- Collecting comprehensive, member-level race and ethnicity data that can be used to collaborate with the community and clinical partners to reduce racial and ethnic inequities.
  Blue Cross is the first health plan in the region to undertake this comprehensive effort.

- Creating metrics and programs to address racial inequities in health care access and quality, including measures of service provided by Blue Cross directly to our members

- Educating employees on the impact of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic factors on Blue Cross members, and effectively using this information in day-to-day interactions both internally and externally.

- Reviewing existing contracts with vendors to assess their programs for detecting and addressing health inequities (e.g., in their algorithms and care management services) and incorporating such questions in future vendor assessment and RFPs.

- Evolving the company's current Diversity, Equity & Inclusion governance structure to include health equity issues, and publishing – company-wide – an enhanced scorecard that measures progress against other best-in-class companies to ensure accountability and transparency.

**Standing for equity in our communities**

The company is also:

- Partnering with the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce Pacesetters Program to support a collaborative initiative to promote minority-owned businesses.

- Becoming the first company to make a public pledge to support the Greater New England Minority Supplier Development Council's new campaign for minority supplier development.

- Asking BCBSMA vendors to maintain a percentage of their business with diverse suppliers and to share related data.

**An inclusive company culture**

The most successful companies are the most diverse, inclusive, and innovative. Blue Cross regards diversity and inclusion at Blue Cross as central to the culture and values at the company. At Blue Cross, diversity isn't just about representation of people from different backgrounds, although that's critically important; it's also about ensuring the entire workforce feels respected, included, and empowered to contribute. 72% of Blue Cross employees are women, and more than 50% of the board of directors are people of color or women.

New initiatives include:

- Further educating Blue Cross leaders about their responsibilities in building an inclusive organization, understanding and eliminating bias in hiring decisions, and best management practices; these initiatives will be incorporated into internal performance metrics.

- Cultivating diverse candidate pools and increasing the development, promotion, and retention of people of color in leadership and at other levels

- Broadening cultural competency education for all employees to enhance awareness of unconscious bias and micro-aggressions

- Adding Juneteenth to the corporate holiday calendar beginning in 2021

The Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation also is making racial inequities in health care one of its three focus areas, along with access to care and mental health. The Foundation will work with its partners to identify policies that present barriers to equitable access to health care and coverage for people of color, and to diversify the workforce and leadership of health care organizations. In addition, the Foundation has launched seven focus groups across the Commonwealth to discuss with BIPOC-led organizations what they see as the solutions to structural racism and racial inequities in health care.

**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 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. BlueLinks for Employers

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For further information: Amy McHugh, Amy.McHugh@bcbsma.com

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