Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts and Blue Cross Blue Shield Association Announce National Health Equity Strategy to Address Racial Health Disparities

Sets goal to make broad, profound, and sustained improvements in health equity

BOSTON, April 20, 2021 /PRNewswire/ -- Blue Cross Blue Shield ofMassachusetts ("Blue Cross") and the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association ("BCBSA") today announced a national health equity strategy to help address racial health disparities. This strategy aims to change the trajectory of health disparities and re-imagine a more equitable health care system by:

- Collecting data to measure disparities
- Scaling effective programs
- Working with clinical partners to improve outcomes and address unconscious bias
- Forming partnerships at the community level
- Influencing policy decisions at the state and federal levels.

This national strategy will complement BCBSMA's already-established goal of making meaningful and sustained progress toward health equity.

"Your health shouldn't depend on the color of your skin or the neighborhood you live in," saidKim Keck, president and CEO of BCBSA. "The crisis in racial disparities in our country's health care is unconscionable and unacceptable. While BCBS companies have made great strides in addressing racial health disparities in our local communities, there is so much more to be done. Our deep roots in the local communities we serve, combined with the scale and scope of our national reach, enable all of us at Blue Cross Blue Shield companies to drive this new strategy and bring real change."

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Strategy

Blue Cross and its Foundation have worked for decades to address inequities in care and to advance racial and social justice.

As part of its renewed commitment to addressing racial health disparities in the communities it serves, 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.

"Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts has committed to making broad and sustained improvements in the equity of health care," said Mark Friedberg, MD, senior vice president of performance measurement & improvement at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts. "Our work begins with measurement, which is critical to identifying inequities and holding ourselves accountable for improvement over time. We look forward to collaborating with our clinical partners, community leaders, and the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association in these important long-term efforts."

Starting this past January, Blue Cross invited its 2.8 million members to share information about their race, ethnicity and preferred language on its member portal. Blue Cross will use the information it collects via the portal and other data collection efforts to improve its programs and services, including the quality of care members receive, the experiences they have as patients and their direct experiences with the company.

National Strategy

BCBSA's National Health Equity Strategy is comprehensive and relies on close collaboration with providers and local community organizations. This collaboration was essential in recent months as BCBS companies worked with local leaders to support vulnerable communities with COVID-19 vaccine access. The strategy includes collecting data to measure disparities, scaling effective programs, working with providers to improve outcomes and address unconscious bias, leaning into partnerships at the community level, and influencing policy decisions at the state and federal levels. The multi-year strategy will focus on four conditions that disproportionately affect communities of color: maternal health, behavioral health, diabetes, and cardiovascular conditions. BCBSA will first focus on maternal health, then behavioral health in 2021.

Setting a Goal to Address Racial Disparities in Maternal Health

BCBSA has set a public goal to reduce racial disparities in maternal health by 50% in five years.

"BCBS companies are fully committed to reach this goal," said Keck. "We will continue to collaborate with our local partners and providers to continually improve our programs and build momentum, and we will seek out new ideas and proven initiatives that accelerate health equity reform."

Metrics will include the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Severe Maternal Morbidity measures. BCBSA will report results annually. Development of nationally consistent measures will evolve over time based on research and in-market learnings.

Panels of Experts Focused on Closing America's Gap in Health Equity

BCBSA has convened a national advisory panel of doctors, public health experts and community leaders to provide guidance. Blue Cross has also convened its own advisory council of leading local and national experts in health inequities to help guide and shape the company's strategy from a broad range of perspectives.

The national Health Equity Strategy is part of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Pledge to Make Meaningful Change. The Pledge speaks to BCBS companies' broad commitment to addressing racial disparity in health and all its forms.

About Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts
Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts (bluecrossma.com) 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.

About the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association
The Blue Cross Blue Shield Association is a national federation of 35 independent, community-based and locally operated Blue Cross and Blue Shield companies that collectively provide healthcare coverage for one in three Americans. BCBSA provides healthcare insights through The Health of America Report series and the national BCBS Health Index℠. For more information on BCBSA and its member companies, please visit BCBS.com. We also encourage you to connect with us on Facebook, check out our videos on YouTube and follow us on Twitter and Instagram. You can read our Pledge to Make Meaningful Change here. To learn more about our National Health Equity Strategy and our Maternal Health Program, visit BlueHealthEquity.com.

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