BLUE CROSS BLUE SHIELD OF MASSACHUSETTS EXPANDS OPTIONS FOR MENTAL HEALTH CARE

New partnerships increase access to primary mental health services and specialized care for OCD, serious mental illness, trauma, and substance use disorders

Mental health provider network tops 17,000 clinicians

BOSTON, May 4, 2022 /PRNewswire/ -- As part of its commitment to ensuring members have access to high quality, affordable mental health care, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts ("Blue Cross") today announced the expansion of its mental health provider network, including additional specialists in a range of areas including obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), serious mental illness, trauma and substance use disorders (SUD). The company is also contracting with primary mental health groups to help match members to clinicians who are most appropriate for their needs and make it easier to schedule an appointment.

"We're taking action to support our members at a time when the need for mental health services has never been greater," said Andrew Dreyfus, Blue Cross' president and CEO. "Research by our Foundation shows that many people who need mental health care struggle to find it, so we're working hard to expand our network and help members find effective, affordable, convenient care when they need it."

Adding primary mental health groups
Blue Cross is enhancing its provider network by contracting with several primary mental health providers that will increase access to services for members. The practices, including Thriveworks, Headway, Refresh Mental Health and Valera Health, bring together independent psychiatrists, psychologists and therapists that can treat a broad array of mental health conditions including serious mental illness. The practices offer sorting and matching capabilities, to make it easier for members to find the type of therapist or psychiatrist best suited to their needs and schedule appointments.

These providers offer treatment with diverse clinicians serving all ages and, as part of their contracts with Blue Cross, have agreed to prioritize the company's members, with appointments available within two days for urgent mental health needs, and five days for mild to moderate needs. The practices have also committed to offering both virtual and in-person care. A recent Blue Cross member survey found that nearly 70% of members want to be able to receive both in-person and telehealth care from the same clinician.

Sub-specialty partnerships
Blue Cross has also contracted with several specialty mental health provider organizations that provide care for specific conditions including obsessive compulsive disorder and substance use disorder.

"There is no one-size-fits-all solution when it comes to mental health," said Dr.Greg Harris, senior medical director for behavioral health at Blue Cross. "Every member needs care that meets their specific needs. These partnerships are an innovative way to expand our network and ensure that members who need specialized care can find a high-quality clinician with availability."

Specialty providers joining the Blue Cross network include NOCD (for outpatient telehealth treatment of OCD) and Forge Health (trauma and substance use disorder care for first responders.) In the coming months, Blue Cross plans to add specialty provider groups focused on severe eating disorders and LGBTQ and racial inequity issues.

Blue Cross continues to offer specialty mental health services through its partnersAware Recovery Care, an in-home addiction treatment provider, and Brightline, a virtual behavioral health care front door for children, teens, and families.

BCBSMA's mental health leadership
This network expansion is part of Blue Cross' ongoing work to enhance members' access to quality mental health care. That includes:

- Expanding its network of mental health practitioners by 37% over the last five years
- Permanently reimbursing telehealth sessions performed by mental health specialists at the same rate as in-person visits. This includes both video and telephonic telehealth services.
- Expanding member access to telehealth coverage for psychiatric care on the company's national telehealth platform
- Adding a range of new mental health services available via telehealth, including intensive outpatient programs
- Expanding the number of child psychiatrists available to members by increasing reimbursement rates by 50% for child psychiatrists who participate in an incentive program
- Offering new financial incentives for primary care physicians to integrate mental health care into their practices with the goal of improving members' physical and mental health outcomes
- Expanding access to an innovative online program, Learn to Live, to help members better manage anxiety and stress

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.

Blue Cross' 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.

Members who need assistance finding mental health and/or substance use support options can call Blue Cross' dedicated behavioral 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.

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