BLUE CROSS BLUE SHIELD OF MASSACHUSETTS' SPENDING ON MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES DOUBLED SINCE START OF PANDEMIC

State's leading health plan continues to expand provider network, virtual care options and mental health resources to meet growing member needs

BOSTON, June 5, 2023 /PRNewswire/ -- Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts' ("Blue Cross") annual spending on mental health services for its members has doubled since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019, the company spent $610 million on mental health services, and new data just released finds that number doubled in 2022 to $1.3 billion. The increase in spending is attributed to more members seeking mental health care and substance use disorder treatment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Access to high-quality, convenient and affordable mental health care has never been more important," said Sarah Iselin, Blue Cross' president and CEO. "We're working hard to expand our network and help members find the right care, when they need it. We are committed to this work because it is the right thing to do for our members and our community."

Blue Cross' mental health provider network has grown by 50% over the past five years, and now includes more than 18,000 clinicians.

As part of its commitment to ensuring members have access to high-quality, affordable mental health care, Blue Cross is further expanding its mental health care network and adding new tools to help members find care that's right for them and their families.

Expanding primary mental health groups
Headway currently participates in Blue Cross' network as one of its primary mental health provider partners and will now be available to out-of-state members for virtual services this summer. Headway has a network of more than 20,000 high-quality credentialed mental health providers across race, gender, ethnicity, and specialty.

Alma, a national primary mental health provider focused on telehealth and in-person therapy and medication management, will be available to Blue Cross members nationwide this summer. Alma's network is made up of more than 13,000 mental health clinicians, with many identifying as Black, Hispanic/LatinX, Asian, and/or LGBTQIA+, enabling culturally competent care to diverse populations.

Alma joins a range of other primary mental health groups that offer therapy and medication management to treat a broad array of mental health conditions and provide support to Blue Cross members. Additional primary mental health groups already in Blue Cross' network include Talkiatry, Thriveworks, Refresh Mental Health and Valera Health, which offer both in-person and virtual treatment with diverse clinicians serving most ages.

Adding sub-specialty providers
Blue Cross is also adding to its network two additional specialty mental health provider organizations that offer care for specific conditions and populations:

- Cortica offers whole-child, value-based care for autistic and other neurodivergent children and their families. Services include medical care, ABA therapy, counseling, and developmental therapies such as speech, physical, and occupational therapy.

- Eleanor Health helps treat substance use disorders and other mental health conditions with personalized care plans for each patient.

They join specialty providers already in the Blue Cross network, including And Still We Rise, Aware Recovery Care, Brightline, DynamiCare, Forge Health and NOCD.

Enhancing care navigation
Blue Cross is also helping guide members to convenient, high-quality mental health care that fits their specific needs.

As part of its innovative mental health strategy, Blue Cross members now have access to deeper personalization capabilities and new tools through the MyBlue member portal. New features, including a self-navigation quiz and a mental health advocate program, help pair members with clinicians that meet their individual needs.

"Adding more providers to our network is critical – but it's not enough," said Dr Greg Harris, senior medical director for mental health. "We know how difficult it can be to find the right type of care for a variety of mental health challenges. We're here to support our members and guide them to the care and resources that they need regardless of where they are at in their mental health journey."

Since these new navigation tools went live in June 2022, nearly 100% of members looking for an in-network provider have been matched through MyBlue, and more than 600 members with more complex needs or specific provider criteria – such as LGBTQ+ friendly and in-person care only – have been placed with a provider that meets their needs.

Additional mental health resources
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. The company 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 also call Blue Cross' dedicated mental health line at (888) 389-7764. Representatives help guide members to the right support, including the mental health advocate program, if needed. In some cases, representatives can 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.

SOURCE Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts

For further information: Kelsey Pearse, kelsey.pearse@bcbsma.com