

Leading Initiatives to Address **Behavioral Health and the Opioid Epidemic**

Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island (BCBSRI) is collaborating with state leaders, providers, and community partners to help improve access to quality, affordable behavioral healthcare, including care that addresses substance use disorders, which may contribute to behavioral health challenges.¹

Understanding the need

The Truven Health Analytics report commissioned by the state in 2014 made several important observations about the status of behavioral health care, cost, and supply and demand in Rhode Island. Key findings included:

- In 2013, Rhode Island spent more than \$813 million on behavioral health treatment, which represented 1.6 percent of the state's GDP; the national average is 1.2 percent of GDP.
- Adults in Rhode Island had the highest rate of psychiatric general hospital admissions among New England states and nationally.
- Twenty-four percent of adults in Rhode Island received mental health care, which is 9 percent higher than the national average, yet 7 percent of Rhode Island adults had a perceived unmet mental health care need, compared with 4.6 percent nationally.
- Nineteen percent of youths aged six to 17 had a diagnosable mental health problem.
- Almost 3 percent of adults experienced "illicit drug abuse or dependence in the last year" compared to 1.7 percent nationally and 1.8 percent regionally.

Recognizing that behavioral health and substance use disorder issues in Rhode Island are complex, BCBSRI has developed programs and partnered on initiatives designed to facilitate access to **evidence-based care** in a variety of settings and at the level needed. In every case, we strive to remove financial and other barriers to seeking treatment.

Care & Treatment Initiatives

HealthPath

HealthPath is a team-based, coordinated home and community-based treatment approach. The program addresses behavioral health and substance use disorder symptoms and the social determinants of health through a team of psychiatrists, nurses, clinicians, case managers, peers, and supports like family members and friends.

Mindful Teen

BCBSRI is collaborating with Bradley Hospital to provide treatment to high-risk adolescents through Dialectical Behavior Therapy, which includes individual and family therapy focused on high-risk behaviors, multi-family skills training around effective coping, and 24x7 phone coaching for parents and teens to prevent crisis.

Eating Disorders

BCBSRI is working with **Be Collaborative** to offer a comprehensive intensive outpatient program for members with eating disorders. The program went live February 15, 2018, but members have been covered under the program since June of 2017.

Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT)

Medication-assisted treatment (MAT) is effective in promoting recovery from opioid use disorders and BCBSRI has removed barriers to accessing this treatment. For example, we no longer require prior authorization. We also make Narcan available to BCBSRI members with no prior authorization required.

Center of Excellence

BCBSRI partnered with CODAC, the state's first Center of Excellence for Opioid Use Disorder Treatment, to expand access to MAT and offer comprehensive services for members with opioid use disorders.

¹According to reports published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*:

- Roughly 50 percent of individuals with severe mental disorders are affected by substance abuse.
- 37 percent of alcohol abusers and 53 percent of drug abusers also have at least one serious mental illness.
- Of all people diagnosed as mentally ill, 29 percent abuse either alcohol or drugs.

MAT program with Roger Williams Medical Center's Addiction Services Center

In 2018, BCBSRI initiated a program with Roger Williams Medical Center (RWMC) that ensures timely, reliable access to MAT. The program bundles services including clinical assessment and physician evaluation with ongoing care, individual and group counseling, case management, and patient-informed feedback. Quality incentives are available to RWMC for making timely appointments, which improve access, and for the use of the patient-informed feedback tool.

Peer Recovery Coaching

Since 2015, BCBSRI has partnered with the **Anchor Recovery Center**, a program of The Providence Center, to offer peer recovery coaches with no member cost sharing. Recovery coaches play an important role in helping people avoid another overdose and stay engaged in treatment.

In late 2017, BCBSRI awarded \$20,000 to The Providence Center to support the development of the **Jim Gillen Teen Center**, the first youth-focused substance use disorder recovery community center in Rhode Island, which opened in June of 2018. The Center will employ the alternative peer group (APG) model, which applies positive peer pressure to reduce risky behaviors and support abstinence. Since their creation in the early 1970s, **APGs have produced a recovery rate greater than 85 percent.** The nationwide recovery rate is approximately 30 percent.

Pharmacy/PCMH

Pharmacists funded by BCBSRI are embedded within patient-centered medical homes, where they have implemented initiatives focusing on decreasing utilization of opioids, including collaborating with patients and providers on establishing opioid medication use and pain management agreements.

Policy Changes

BCBSRI has implemented changes to enhance access to to high-quality, affordable healthcare. We have removed our prior approval requirement, known as a utilization review, for in-network mental health or substance use disorder services. In addition to removing utilization review, BCBSRI also lowered the copayment for outpatient office visits.

Leadership and Promoting Awareness

At our 2016 and 2017 annual community forums, BCBSRI promoted awareness of the broad extent to which the opioid epidemic has touched Rhode Islanders. We focused in particular on offering ways to reduce the stigma associated with addiction, as stigma creates a barrier to seeking treatment.

On an ongoing basis, BCBSRI leaders participate in state-wide initiatives to address the opioid epidemic and to improve access to behavioral health treatment, including the Governor's Opioid Overdose Task Force and related recovery and center of excellence workgroups, and the Office of the Health Insurance Commissioner's CTC Integrated Behavioral Health Committee.

In September of 2018, BCBSRI became the lead investor in the newly created Behavioral Health Fund at the Rhode Island Foundation. BCBSRI committed to investing \$5 million over five years in the fund, which will serve to supplement the state's investments in behavioral health, with a focus on prevention, through a competitive grants program.

What's next?

We know there is a great deal more that can and must be done.

Despite the availability of evidence-based treatment programs, fewer people than we expected have sought and/or completed treatment for behavioral health and substance use disorders. And even programs that are considered successful show only a 40 percent completion rate. We must continue to find ways to reach a broader segment of the population that needs help, and to encourage readiness both to seek and to stay in treatment.

We pledge to continue our partnership with providers to identify effective clinical and financial models, increasing access to a continuum of care. We will also continue our collaboration with the Rhode Island Department of Health and the Office of the Health Insurance Commissioner to ensure we are leveraging all available resources to benefit Rhode Islanders battling behavioral health issues.

One thing is certain: we cannot do this important work alone. In partnership with state, business, and community leaders, providers and payers, we are determined to be part of the solution.

