



## FIGHTING THE OPIOID CRISIS WITH CARE IN THE COMMUNITY

Opioid use and related overdose deaths have skyrocketed in the United States over the past decade. As the opioid epidemic has spread, it has ruined lives, fundamentally altered communities and strained government institutions. No state, region or individual – regardless of age, gender or socio-economic status – has been immune. Nationwide, there has been a renewed focus on efforts to reduce improper opioid use as well as care for those who need support and recovery.

**2 MILLION  
AMERICANS**

currently have an opioid  
use disorder.

Every day, about  
**130 AMERICANS DIE**  
from an opioid overdose.

The opioid epidemic costs the  
U.S. economy  
**MORE THAN \$696  
BILLION ANNUALLY.**

As an important step in addressing the opioid epidemic, the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association (BCBSA) launched the Blue Distinction® Centers for Substance Use Treatment and Recovery, which helps to improve care by identifying providers across the full continuum of care who deliver and facilitate treatment for substance use disorder, including opioid use disorder (OUD).

As the health care partner to one in three Americans, Blue Cross and Blue Shield (BCBS) companies have been addressing the crisis, community by community, long before the public health threat became a national headline. BCBS companies remain committed to fighting the opioid epidemic by reducing improper opioid use, providing community resources and enhancing clinical expertise.

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## HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES:

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### BLUE CROSS BLUE SHIELD OF ARIZONA

Arizona has been hit hard by the opioid epidemic having seen a 76 percent increase in opioid overdoses from 2013 to 2019 and nearly 7,000 suspected overdose-related deaths since 2017. To address this alarming rise, **Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arizona** (BCBSAZ) launched Mobilize AZ, investing \$10 million over three years to support prevention, treatment and recovery. Working with local organizations, such as the Crisis Response Network and its subsidiary, Centerpoint for Hope, BCBSAZ launched a free mobile medication-assisted treatment (MAT) clinic, which travels statewide, visiting both urban and rural areas to bring resources to people struggling with opioid and substance misuse. Through a Mobilize AZ statewide incentive campaign, Arizona gained 618 newly MAT-certified providers. Each can prescribe for 30 patients in the first year, which opened 18,540 more treatment spots.

### BLUE CROSS AND BLUE SHIELD OF NEW MEXICO

Nearly one-third of all emergency room visits in New Mexico are related to substance use and mental health disorders. Too often, the same individuals return to the ER in crisis. To stop this revolving door, **Blue Cross and Blue Shield of New Mexico** introduced Peer Support Specialists – individuals who themselves are in recovery – to connect those who are struggling with the care they need. The program has seen a 69 percent drop in ER visits and a 52 percent decrease in readmission rates. BCBS companies in Florida and Illinois are employing similar techniques.

### BLUE CROSS AND BLUE SHIELD OF MONTANA

In addition to the sharp rise in suicide rates and the ongoing heroin and methamphetamine use, Montana, where opioids were involved in half of all drug overdose deaths, also faces a growing opioid crisis. To help fight the opioid crisis, **Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Montana** (BCBSMT) launched the Blue Sky Initiative – a statewide campaign that brings together the health care community, local leaders and the state government to help reduce the stigma often associated

with mental health struggles and drug overdoses by supporting a 50-stop, 10-week tour of the Grandstreet Theater production of “Every Brilliant Thing.” BCBSMT also is collaborating with local organizations to bring the PAX Good Behavior Game into K-3 classrooms to provide the tools needed to cope with social, emotional and behavioral challenges.

### HIGHMARK BLUE CROSS AND BLUE SHIELD

During COVID-19, when getting in-person care has become a challenge, it’s been especially hard for patients suffering from OUD, many of whom have experienced increased isolation, stress and the challenge of finding or staying in treatment. To provide support for these patients as well as those living in rural areas where treatment providers are scarce, **Highmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield** partnered with Bright Heart Health, a telemedicine provider which remotely connects patients with medical staff and counselors to deliver the ‘gold standard’ of opioid recovery—MAT. Available 24/7, patients are assessed and connected to their care team for individualized treatment, receive medications through the mail and can access counselors through smart phones, tablets or their computer.

### ANTHEM BLUE CROSS AND BLUE SHIELD

After successfully working with pharmacies to lower the number of opioid prescriptions filled by more than 53 percent since 2015, **Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield**, which has companies located in 14 states, pledged to expand whole-person treatment for those suffering from OUD in 2016. By combining MAT with counseling, patients receive therapies that treat both mind and body and are believed to produce better outcomes. To achieve this goal, Anthem retooled payments to doctors to encourage treatment for both drug therapy and counseling, supported MAT certification as well as MAT skills training and sharing of best practices through Project ECHO, and expanded access to telemedicine to keep patients connected to treatment during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, Anthem has boosted the combined percentage of consumers in employer-based, individual and Medicaid plans with opioid use disorder receiving both therapies from 22 percent to 56 percent. Medicaid plans alone increased from 24 percent to 65 percent.