

California Health Plans: Dedicated to Mental Health Care



Leading on Mental Health Parity For Over Two Decades

California's health plans have been providing comprehensive mental health and substance use disorder coverage for decades. We have been dedicated to working collaboratively with state leaders to ensure continued compliance with mental health parity laws and to improve the state's mental health care system — so that particularly in times of crisis our members can continue to access the care they need when they need it.

Timeline:

1999: California passes laws requiring coverage for mental health and substance use disorder treatment and coverage for a wide array of mental health conditions be on par with any other physical condition.

2008: Congress passes parity law which strengthens protections for those seeking treatment for both mental health and substance use disorders.

2014: ACA expands the scope of mental health and substance use disorder treatment coverages.

2020: Plans expand online access to mental health services during the COVID-19 pandemic, including free digital resources, mental health apps, phone and video call therapy sessions, and public webinars to raise awareness.



Delivering on Our Promise

Health plans understand there is more we must all do to meet the treatment needs of those suffering from addiction or mental illness and we are committed to doing so with the same urgency and coverage as patients with any other illness or injury.

As demand for these services continues to increase due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, health plans have been working with providers to innovate even more by:

- Implementing anti-stigma campaigns that have dramatically increased awareness and encouragement to seek help.
- Standardizing screening and treatment in primary and emergency care.
- Expanding access to telehealth and increasing online access for all patients.
- Ensuring access to comprehensive and coordinated care plans, known as Behavioral Health Homes.
- Reimagining models of care to match the right treatments to individual patient care plans.
- Embedding behavioral health providers in primary care doctor's offices
- Providing mental health awareness resources to California schools focused particularly on middle and high school aged children.



The Challenge

While mental health and substance use disorder treatment parity are established law and a basic right on which we all agree, **ensuring our state has tools and the people needed to deliver on that promise is a shared responsibility among state leaders, health plans, providers, and behavioral health advocates that we must all work together to address.**

Another future challenge is outlined in the 2019 Future Health Workforce Commission report, which states that by 2028, California will have 50% fewer psychiatrists and 28% fewer psychologists, marriage and family therapists, and licensed counselors and social workers.

Taking Action

In 2019, Governor Gavin Newsom and the legislature began to address this challenge by investing \$110 million in mental health workforce development. Health plans and providers alike are also investing hundreds of millions of dollars in a wide variety of initiatives to improve access, such as:

- New and renovated offices more appropriate for individual and group therapeutic care.
- Scholarships and loan forgiveness to build the pipeline of mental health clinicians.
- Screening and education programs in schools and colleges to familiarize young people with the field of mental health care.

2020 began with Governor Newsom establishing a Behavioral Health Task Force to implement needed reforms to our state's mental health system. With increased anxiety over the COVID-19 pandemic, many health plans expanded mental health support and resources to individuals and organizations to include more telehealth and virtual options. Plans have contributed millions of dollars toward implementing changes to their mental health offerings that ensure both online and in-person access will continue.

Now as our state recovers, we must refocus on the workforce and care coordination policies that will have the biggest impact on achieving even greater access to mental health and substance use disorder treatment for all Californians.

