



A Behavioral Health Plan

How comprehensive behavioral health management boosts health, cuts costs

Integrating a comprehensive behavioral health plan into the medical health plan your company sponsors is a win-win. Employees are able to improve their health mentally and physically, and the employer can track cost savings related to direct health care costs and indirect costs through more productive, healthy employees.

“One out of every four adults will experience a mental health disorder in a given year,” says Tom Albert, manager, Behavioral Health Services at HealthLink. “I think few people, in general, realize the rates are that high.”

How do behavioral and medical health impact employers?

The rate of one in four adults experiencing a mental health disorder annually goes even higher for those with chronic medical problems. Furthermore, employees with untreated psychiatric or substance use disorders can be at a higher risk of on-the-job injuries. This can lead to missed time from work, expensive treatment and a decrease in quality of life for the individual.

Absenteeism is not the only concern for employers. Presenteeism, or the loss in productivity of employees who come to work sick, can also be costly for employers. The Institute for Health and Productivity Studies at Cornell University found that depression and other mental health problems are among the illnesses that have the most significant decrease to productivity.

What's the advantage of integrating behavioral and medical health management?

Ninety-three percent of Americans believe a health care plan should cover behavioral health treatment, according to a National Association of Psychiatric Health Systems survey. Some workplaces don't cover behavioral health. Other employer groups cover it but carve out the management, which makes it difficult to coordinate care.

Having one organization manage both medical and behavioral health benefits is gaining popularity among employers. With integration, the health plan's medical and behavioral clinicians collaborate and ensure that individuals and their families have access to care that best meets their needs.

What are the overall goals of utilization and case management for behavioral health?

Utilization management ensures that health plan members have access to the care they need; that care is delivered in the right setting; that the quality of care meets high standards; and that resources are used efficiently in order to help control costs.

Case management involves case managers communicating directly with members and their families to assist them in navigating the health care system; addressing any obstacles to accessing treatment; and empowering members and their families to maintain an optimal level of health and functioning.

Case management helps the member to stay well so he or she doesn't have to keep using the same services and missing work.

What is the Mental Health Parity Act?

The Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 doesn't mandate that employers of 50 or more employees offer behavioral health coverage, but it does require that if the health plan covers behavioral health services, the financial requirements and treatment limitations are no more restrictive than medical and surgical benefits.

Prior to parity, employer groups often relied on treatment limits to control costs by limiting the number of days in a hospital or the number of visits for outpatient mental health treatment. Parity is good because the limits often were arbitrary, but it does mean the best way to control costs is to ensure care is only approved when medically necessary.

What are the results of formalized behavioral health management and review?

A Milliman case study of a large private manufacturer found a 10 percent reduction in members with chronic medical and psychological conditions saved \$1 million annually and another \$750,000 from reduced absenteeism, fewer and shorter disabilities, and increased productivity. An effective behavioral health management organization ensures members receive the right treatment in the least restrictive setting, which reduces costs and time missed from work, while improving overall health

