



Community Health Plan of Washington Delivers Pioneering Supports for Behavior Health Providers in Washington During COVID-19 Pandemic

The local health plan advances \$4 million for behavioral health providers to help ensure support to individuals in need

SEATTLE – June 9, 2020 – [Community Health Plan of Washington \(CHPW\)](#), Washington’s local not-for-profit Medicaid (Apple Health) and Medicare managed care plan, announced additional resources for behavioral health providers to support the health and well-being of Washington’s communities amid the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of this effort, CHPW is advancing a total of \$4 million to help cover anticipated lost revenue for 66 contracted behavioral health providers across the state for April through September 2020.

Behavioral health is a key component of the COVID-19 response. According to an April [Kaiser Family Foundation poll](#), COVID-19 related stressors like isolation and loneliness have negatively impacted mental health, and rising unemployment rates are linked to greater suicide risk.

“The need for access to behavioral health support is critical now as people in Washington face imminent challenges of loss, isolation and fear due to COVID-19, and the stresses related to the most recent acts of racism and violence against Black people in this country,” said Leanne Berge, CEO of Community Health Plan of Washington. “We are committed to working with the behavioral health providers and the Washington State Health Care Authority (HCA) to help meet the immediate needs of providers and, ultimately, the people we all serve across the state.”

CHPW is first prioritizing assistance to providers who rely on Medicaid for a majority of their revenue; those who are impacted by lower client visits due to COVID-19; or are a critical source for services in their region.

In addition to the advanced funding, CHPW is ensuring behavioral care is available across the state by:

- Creating flexible telehealth billing policies early in the pandemic to process and pay claims easily, as many behavioral health providers have moved to provide services through telehealth.
- Convening regularly scheduled regional forums with behavioral health providers to share resources, status of services, new restrictions and collaborate around patients’ needs.
- Developing a [resource document specifically for behavioral health providers](#) with key guidance and resources on billing/policy changes, telehealth, seeking financial assistance, facility closure information, and both provider and member resources.
- Developing specific training on telehealth with the Behavioral Health Institute at the University of Washington and the HCA.



- Promoting free cell phones and expanded data plans to CHPW members so they can access telehealth services.

CHPW's claims for Behavioral Health increased over 1,000% from January through April for its Medicaid members.

An April 16th analysis of forecasted behavioral health impacts from COVID-19 issued by the State of Washington's Department of Health states, "The behavioral health impacts from the COVID-19 outbreak and related government actions will likely cause a surge in behavioral health symptoms across the state. This surge will present differently based on the stage of the pandemic, the effectiveness of the overall response effort, and the populations being impacted... Efforts should focus on activating/augmenting existing community supports to increase social connections, which reduces behavioral health symptoms, and encouraging active coping skills among target audiences."

To this end, CHPW is also reaching out to its members to ensure they have support through social services and behavioral health supports in place.

- CHPW staff have called more than 40,000 CHPW members to ensure their essential needs are being met during the crisis – from food and safe shelter to over-the-counter supplies. For many isolated members, CHPW case managers have been their only connection during the stay at home order.
- CHPW's care management staff touched base with more than 1,200 members in April alone to coordinate medical care, pharmacy deliveries, and behavioral health services. Staff continue to go the extra mile – one care manager helped a senior member living alone get her cable service turned back on. The member shared that because of this help, she could now get herself out of bed and take charge of her day.
- The community program team is following up on members' needs with housing, food, utilities, peer support, unemployment benefits and available financial support for those who have lost income.
- Case managers are providing grief support and connections to pastoral support with members who have lost family to COVID-19.
- The health plan has sent text messages in multiple languages to Medicaid members with reminders of CHPW's Nurse Advice Line, their mental health benefits, cellphone benefit, and social service resources.

"By quickly adapting our approach during COVID-19, we've made it easier for behavioral health providers to address the mental health needs of their patients and support our members when they need it most, said Berge. "We are committed to increasing access to ensure that communities across the state receive the behavioral health support that they need."



Medicaid is federal-state partnership providing healthcare for income-eligible individuals and families who are unable to access healthcare through an employer or on the healthcare exchange.

To learn more about CHPW visit, chpw.org. To access CHPW’s free online behavioral health resource center, which connects people with providers, crisis helplines, local support groups, and information on managing mental health and substance use conditions, visit <https://www.chpw.org/for-members/mental-health-resources>.

About CHPW

Founded in 1992 by a network of community and migrant health centers in Washington State, Community Health Plan of Washington is a community-governed, not-for-profit health plan. The mission of CHPW is to deliver accessible managed care services that meet the needs and improve the health of Washington communities and to make managed care participation beneficial for community-responsive providers. CHPW serves approximately 265,000 members through Medicaid and Medicare programs across the State. Its parent, CHNW, serves nearly one million individuals across Washington through its network sites. To learn more, visit chpw.org or connect on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), or [LinkedIn](#).

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