



**BlueCross BlueShield
of Minnesota**

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NEWS RELEASE

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Blue Cross to Increase Reimbursement for Psychiatric Services

Addresses the most serious barrier to access and treatment for mental health issues

EAGAN, Minn. (March 31, 2006) — Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota announced today that it will increase payment for psychiatric services by 20 percent a year over the next three years in an attempt to significantly improve access for mental health services.

“As the largest private sector purchaser of mental health services in Minnesota, Blue Cross is concerned about the problems people are having accessing mental health care services. We’ve heard time and again that access to psychiatrists, especially for children, is one of the most serious problems facing health care in our state,” said Colleen Reitan, president and COO. “By this action, we hope to accomplish several things; to keep psychiatrists in practice in Minnesota, to make it easier for psychiatrists to work in consulting roles to primary care physicians and other therapists and to encourage more physicians to enter the fields of child and adult psychiatry.”

Blue Cross says this is just the first step in helping increase capacity to mental health services. “In the long term, we hope that this will provide the catalyst for dramatic change in access and treatment for people who need mental health care services,” Reitan said. “We need to be more creative to meet the mental health care needs of our members and all Minnesotans today and in the future.”

Added Reitan: “Everyone knows that the current system is not working very well. Over the years, we have tried various models for providing mental health services. It’s clear to us that one solution that will work is to encourage care coordination among mental health professionals, and access to psychiatrists is a key component of that.”

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Mental health care issues continue to be a challenge. More than one in four Americans suffer from a mental illness. According to the 2004 U.S. census residential population estimate for ages 18 and older, 57.7 million Americans (26.2 percent) suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder. Even though mental disorders are widespread in the population, the main burden of illness is concentrated in a much smaller proportion — about 6 percent, or 1 in 17 — who suffer from a serious mental illness (*Source: source: nimh.nih.gov*). Nearly half of people with mental illness suffer with more than one disorder. Forty-five percent of those with any mental disorder meet criteria for two or more disorders (*Source: nimh.nih.gov*). And there continues to be a shortage of psychiatrists and access to mental health services for Blue Cross members.

The increase in payments for mental health services are effective July 1.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, with headquarters in the St. Paul suburb of Eagan, was chartered in 1933 as Minnesota's first health plan and continues to carry out its charter mission today: to promote a wider, more economical and timely availability of health services for the people of Minnesota. A not-for-profit, taxable organization, Blue Cross is the largest health plan based in Minnesota, covering 2.7 million members in Minnesota and nationally through its health plans or plans administered by its affiliated companies. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, headquartered in Chicago. Go to www.bluecrossmn.com to learn more about Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota.