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Report Urges Transformational Approach to Behavioral Health Care

*People with Mental Health Conditions and Substance Use Disorders
in Massachusetts Remain Challenged by Fragmented System*

BOSTON (Jan. 31, 2019) – The [Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation](#) today released a new report, in collaboration with Manatt Health, that calls on all policymakers and stakeholders to move beyond incremental improvements and bring transformational reform to the state’s fragmented, difficult-to-navigate behavioral health care system.

For the comprehensive report, titled *Ready for Reform: Behavioral Health Care in Massachusetts*, Manatt analyzed the Commonwealth’s current behavioral health care system, which serves residents with mental health conditions and substance use disorders. Researchers identified the system’s many strengths and persistent weaknesses and then constructed a “model” system to guide the new vision.

Massachusetts policymakers and health care leaders have long prioritized improvements to behavioral health care, most recently because of the opioid epidemic. However, despite ongoing attention and investment in targeted initiatives, the system still has significant gaps in the continuum of care that result in long wait times for appointments and difficulty moving from one level of care to another.

“Many in our state have personally experienced the challenges of navigating the behavioral health care system, and the problems have been well documented,” said Audrey Shelto, president of the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation. “We are fortunate to have many high-quality behavioral health providers and organizations in Massachusetts, and it is clear that they and other key stakeholders are eager to join together to launch a major reform effort. I believe that we have the experience and skill, as well as the will and tenacity, to get it done.”

The report recommends that the Commonwealth pursue a series of specific and actionable reforms focused on five key priorities:

- Make it easier for people to seek and access behavioral health care services;
- Ensure the availability of a comprehensive, person-centered behavioral health care continuum of services for all individuals regardless of payer, service needs, or age;
- Invest in workforce development and capacity efforts to attract and retain behavioral health care professionals and support the development of a culturally competent and linguistically diverse workforce;



- Develop a plan for better aligning and consolidating behavioral health care administrative, regulatory, and purchasing functions across state agencies; and
- Establish a Behavioral Health Reform Team charged with developing and implementing a three-year action plan to advance solutions to key behavioral health care challenges in the state that require additional research and stakeholder engagement.

The full report and chartpack can be found online at the following webpage:

<https://bluecrossmafoundation.org/publication/ready-reform-behavioral-health-care-massachusetts>

To develop the new vision, Manatt researchers interviewed and facilitated discussion groups with state and national behavioral health experts, stakeholders and thought leaders, and conducted a comprehensive landscape scan of the current public and private behavioral health care system in Massachusetts. Researchers created a recovery-focused conceptual model and then identified gaps between the current and model systems.

“Massachusetts has made major investments in mental health and substance use disorder services. This analysis recommends a comprehensive system-wide set of solutions in the areas of access, workforce, and the delivery of integrated, whole-person care,” said [Patricia M. Boozang](#), senior managing director at Manatt Health and co-author of the report. “Addressing those challenges is the key to getting from where the Commonwealth is today to its vision of a model behavioral health system.”

About the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation

The mission of the [Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation](#) is to expand access to health care for low-income and vulnerable individuals and families in the Commonwealth. The Foundation was founded in 2001 with an initial endowment from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts. It operates separately from the company and is governed by its own Board of Directors.

About Manatt Health

Manatt Health integrates legal and consulting expertise to better serve the complex needs of clients across the health care system. Combining legal excellence, firsthand experience in shaping public policy, sophisticated strategy insight and deep analytic capabilities, Manatt Health provides uniquely valuable professional services to the full range of health industry players. The diverse team of more than 160 attorneys and consultants from Manatt, Phelps & Phillips, LLP, and its consulting subsidiary, Manatt Health Strategies, LLC, is passionate about helping its clients advance their business interests, fulfill their missions and lead health care into the future. For more information, visit www.manatt.com/health.

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