**Blue Cross NC Launches Long-Term Commitment to Address Root Causes of Youth Mental Health Crisis in North Carolina**

*Company takes first step to improve youth resiliency and well-being in new, multi-year initiative, starting with on-demand mental health care, increased in-network providers, school-based counseling and Youth Mental Health First Aid Training*

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina (Blue Cross NC) today launched the first phase of a statewide, transformational commitment to improving youth mental well-being, resiliency and connectivity. The initial phase begins with comprehensive enhancements to the company’s mental health offerings, targeting improvements in support services and access to care across all 100 North Carolina counties.

This foundational step is the beginning of an ongoing, multi-year effort that comes in response to insights gained from the [Extra Miles Tour](https://www.extramilestour.com/), a statewide listening tour completed in 2023. Throughout the tour, company leaders heard firsthand about widespread feelings of lacking purpose, social isolation and loneliness among young North Carolinians – underscoring the pressing and urgent need to improve the well-being and connectivity of youth across the state. Community leaders are stepping in to fill the gaps, but more work is needed to accelerate and elevate their work.

“Today marks the beginning of a long-term effort to improve youth well-being and resilience, driven by the insights we gained from hundreds of conversations across the state and the voices of our communities and youth. While this effort will take all of us working side by side, Blue Cross NC is starting by acknowledging our unique role as an insurer in addressing this crisis. We aim to make immediate and impactful improvements to our products and services to deliver much-needed care,” said Kelly Calabria, Senior Vice President, Chief Marketing and Corporate Responsibility Officer, Blue Cross NC.

“Yet North Carolina’s youth are facing a crisis that goes beyond mental health; it is a crisis of connection, purpose, and community. We must listen to and collaborate with young people to radically rethink our approach to this crisis. Blue Cross NC is also committed to addressing the structural challenges undermining our youth’s well-being using every tool available to us to address root causes and build a brighter, healthier future for all,” she continued.

To start, Blue Cross NC is making several key improvements to its services for both members and communities – additional information on each offering can be found here.

*For Blue Cross NC Members*

* **Providing Behavioral Health Rapid Response to make access to care easier**, including on-demand services for customers who need urgent, same-day mental health service. Behavioral Health Rapid Response also alleviates capacity issues in mental health care by providing alternatives to emergency room visits.
* **Expanding access to counseling in schools.** This initiative supports early intervention, continuous support and academic success by making mental health resources more accessible in schools, including virtual care, where [youth are six times more likely to accept](https://nam12.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fpubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov%2F20419730%2F&data=05%7C02%7CMaya.Franklin%40bcbsnc.com%7C0f6002735043439f28e408dcc0629c43%7C8554e7b2e6684c1c8d273b12f5c733ac%7C0%7C0%7C638596776962197167%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=Aj86ARCHywSZpyjZ3FIJttBRmms0gZbtGg17Nmm7fxk%3D&reserved=0) these services. Behavioral health services provided in schools will be covered for members.
* **Increasing in-network behavioral health providers** by 20% since June 2022 with the addition of 6,900 providers, making it easier for all members to find and receive mental health care when it is needed most.
* **Simplifying care through the** [**Behavioral Health Care Navigation service,**](https://www.bluecrossnc.com/providers/networks-programs/behavioral-health) which makes it easier and faster to find mental health support by helping customers and their primary care providers quickly connect to behavioral health professionals.

*For Communities*

* **Bringing Youth Mental Health First Aid Training to all 100 counties**. Blue Cross NC will leverage its employees and partnerships with youth-based organizations to train 3,700 people including 1,000 youth and 10% of its workforce in Youth Mental Health First Aid Training by the end of 2025. This training equips adults who regularly interact with young people with the skills to identify and respond to mental health challenges, using a five-step action plan for both crisis and non-crisis situations to foster a safe, supportive environment.
* **Launching Blue Corps, Blue Cross NC’s skills-based volunteerism program,** to utilize the unique skills of its workforce to support community partners – particularly in their work around mental health – enhancing the impact of local initiatives.

**Answering an Urgent and Pressing Need**

Youth today [report](https://happiness-report.s3.amazonaws.com/2024/WHR+24.pdf) feeling a lack of connection and purpose, which contributes to a range of mental health challenges. As a result, mental health diagnoses among young people in North Carolina have surged, with [one in five](https://www.ncdhhs.gov/unified-school-behavioral-health-action-plan/open?mc_cid=e6abeb9cef&mc_eid=e5671e7d27;) high school students seriously considering suicide in recent years and [more than four in ten](https://nciom.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Data-Handout-for-Annual-Meeting-CONCLUDED.pdf) reporting they feel hopeless or sad every single day.

At the same time, North Carolina ranks [44th in the nation](https://www.mhanational.org/issues/2024/mental-health-america-access-care-data) for access to care for people with mental health conditions. In 2023, a staggering 62% of youth with depression in the state [did not receive treatment](https://campaign.unc.edu/story/improving-child-and-adolescent-mental-health/#:~:text=The%20growing%20crisis&text=Suicide%20is%20now%20the%20second,depression%20don't%20receive%20treatment.) due to lack of access, and [more than two-thirds](https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/Advocacy/Federal_and_State_Initiatives/Workforce_Maps/Home.aspx) of North Carolina’s 100 counties do not have a single child or adolescent psychiatrist.

“Now more than ever, youth and families need support to improve their mental well-being and increase connection,” said Stephen Friedhoff, MD, Senior Vice President Health Care Services, Blue Cross NC. “While expanding access to mental health care is a critical step forward in a healthier future for all North Carolinians, we know there is more to do to ensure North Carolina's youth have the tools to thrive. We look forward to partnering with community leaders on additional initiatives in the months to come.”

Blue Cross NC’s improved services – which leverage its resources, community partnerships, and 3,800 dedicated North Carolina employees – build on the company’s ongoing commitment to improving mental health care and caring for young people across the state.

**About Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina:**

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina (Blue Cross NC) is committed to making health care better, simpler and more affordable. We have been driving better health in North Carolina since 1933, working to tackle our communities’ greatest health challenges. Blue Cross NC serves its customers and communities of 4.3 million members, including approximately 1.1 million on behalf of other Blue Plans. Blue Cross NC is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. Visit Blue Cross NC online at [www.bluecrossnc.com](http://www.bluecrossnc.com/). All other marks are the property of their respective owners.