

EVERNORTHSM

WHY WE NEED BETTER BEHAVIORAL CARE

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NO ONE SHOULD SETTLE FOR “BARELY COPING”

Behavioral wellness is the ability of an individual to achieve the stability and resilience they need to manage the challenges they confront. But achieving this can also be a challenge.

“Only 17% of us are in optimal mental health,”¹ says Eva Borden, President, Evernorth Behavioral Health. “The other 83% [of Americans] are just about coping,” Borden adds, “living with mental discomfort or distress, such as anxiety or stress, but not ready to seek help.”²

Only 17% of U.S. adults are considered to be in a state of optimal mental health.¹

Denial that anything is wrong or the feeling that something indefinable isn't right can last months or even years. This extended period of “barely coping” can be dangerous. It bears a heightened risk of damaging key relationships or exacerbating other negative spirals, such as use of alcohol or narcotics. A smaller issue could also escalate to something more serious, with a relatively minor trigger pushing a person into an acute crisis.

For someone living with behavioral health problems, the consequences of delaying treatment can be severe. And their plan sponsor may face increasing medical and behavioral care costs as a result.

To stop this cycle of coping, it's important to first understand what behavioral health is.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH IS NOT JUST MENTAL HEALTH

Behavioral health is defined as “the promotion of mental health, resilience and well-being; the treatment of mental and substance use disorders; and the support of those who experience and/or are in recovery from these conditions, along with their families and communities.”³

Dr. Douglas Nemecek, Chief Medical Officer, Evernorth Behavioral Health, asserts that behavioral health is not simply about improving mental health – it’s a broad, overarching term that includes conditions ranging from mental illness to obesity, substance use and autism.



The best way to view the wide range of behavioral health needs is as a spectrum of severity and complexity (known as "acuity"). It ranges from low-acuity conditions that are not always clinically diagnosable, such as stress or anxiety, to high-acuity conditions that might become visible through autism, depression or substance use.

If left untreated, these behavioral health conditions could escalate, increasing the risk of developing more severe and costly conditions.

People with depression are at **increased risk** of developing chronic physical conditions, such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease.⁴

92% of adults living with behavioral health disorders also suffer from physical conditions.⁵

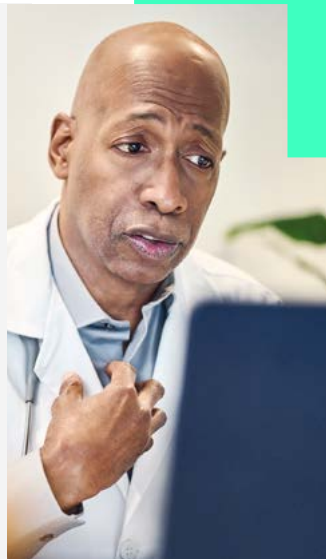
Not only are individuals more at risk but health plans see increased costs.

On average, those who have both behavioral and medical conditions cost employers three to six times more than those who have physical problems alone.⁶

Dr. Nemecek knows that “not addressing behavioral health is increasing the spend on heart disease, diabetes, orthopedic care, cancer, etc., as well as significantly impacting staff turnover and productivity for employers.”

For plan sponsors, the costs of these unaddressed behavioral health conditions can really add up.

To help individuals achieve their optimal health, providers need to address **physical and mental symptoms** together.



WHOLE-PERSON CARE IS GOOD BEHAVIORAL CARE

In contrast to a broken bone, in behavioral care there is little consistency in whether, when or how a patient is treated.

A behavioral health problem is often nuanced. In determining treatment, one must consider the following:

EDUCATION

EMPLOYMENT/WORK CONDITIONS

HOUSING

FAMILY

SOCIAL INCLUSION

BIRTH CONDITIONS

For example, an individual could have trouble getting to an appointment because they have responsibilities at home or live in a rural area.

Considering these social determinants of health is important, as they could influence a person's ability and willingness to engage with the support offered.



Treating the Person, Not the Symptom

Dr. Nemecek thinks that in addition to looking at a patient's social determinants of health, one must focus on their medical history and other symptoms.

For instance, if a behavioral health issue has a physical impact, such as weight change, sleep disturbance or gastrointestinal changes, initial attempts to treat it might focus on those symptoms. But a partial solution that doesn't truly treat the cause of the problem could lead to relapse or escalation.

What Does “Better” Look Like?

In behavioral care there is also no objective test to see if treatment worked. Dr. Nemecek believes that one must evaluate the patient's functional improvement, or what it means to get better, to determine if treatment is successful.

- + **Can they be productive in the community?**
- + **Can they do something meaningful?**
- + **Is there someone to love or care for them?**

When all those things happen, a person's happiness may increase and suicide levels can go down.

Tackling connected issues together can help prevent new problems from arising or keep existing ones from worsening.

It's Time to Break Down Silos

Since behavioral conditions impact the whole person, patients require a personalized solution. This means quickly understanding specific needs and providing convenient access to the right combination of therapy, medication and clinical support services at the right stage in the individual's journey.

When medical history and treatments aren't being shared due to fragmented systems and historical silos, providers lack a comprehensive view of the patient's health journey, which may negatively impact their ability to provide care quickly, measure progress or track outcomes.

By connecting health care providers and encouraging exchanges of information, behavioral and clinical providers can streamline delivery, improving the patient experience and enabling synergies between therapeutic and pharmaceutical approaches.

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF COPING HELPS REDUCE COSTS



The whole-person approach helps identify the root causes of behavioral health problems. And addressing them early can be more affordable than repeatedly providing medical care, which only treats symptoms and not causes.

If issues are not addressed early, they can also escalate to become higher-acuity problems, with greater direct and indirect costs making a more substantial impact on business performance. **The indirect costs of mental health conditions, such as reduced productivity, exceed the cost of direct mental health treatment.⁷**

Including robust behavioral health care options can help prevent an employee from reaching a crisis point and provide a significant return on investment by helping them to perform at their best for longer.

An analysis conducted by Evernorth found that a person diagnosed with a behavioral health condition who received behavioral outpatient care had up to

\$3,109 lower total health care costs in the second year compared to one who didn't receive such care.⁸

MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER



Currently, patients aren't receiving the behavioral care they deserve. In fact, the White House revealed that **the average delay from the onset of mental health symptoms to treatment is 11 years.**⁹

Fortunately, Borden believes we're on an exponential curve, accelerating the evolution of what's possible. Changes that took 18 months a few years ago are now happening in much less time.

One important step forward is vast data analysis. With it, we can understand where the patient is on their behavioral health journey and identify issues and engage the patient earlier on. Holistic care and measurement throughout are also critical. We can see how a patient's overall behavioral health is improving and provide the right level of care when the patient needs it.



If we proactively work together, we can help improve behavioral care and create better outcomes for both patients and plan sponsors.

KEY TAKEAWAYS



Treat the whole person and offer personalized solutions for patients.

This means quickly understanding an individual's specific needs and providing them with the right combination of therapy, medication and clinical support services at the right stage in their journey.



Make care accessible and easier to find.

This could mean offering multiple care touchpoints for people to engage with, such as virtual consultations, text and mobile services.



Identify and address behavioral health issues early on.

This approach can be more affordable and prevent issues from developing into more severe and costly conditions.

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