A health plan’s approach to providing palliative care everywhere

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Program description

We’re committed to creating a healthcare system that is worthy of our family and friends – and sustainably affordable. Our expanded palliative care program moves us closer to achieving this mission.

After the successful launch of a home-based palliative care pilot program in January 2017, Blue Shield expanded the program to enable our members to access these services wherever they live. Blue Shield built this statewide network of home-based palliative care providers through collaborative partnerships with our provider groups and accountable care organizations (ACOs), offering a broad network of facility-based and home-based palliative care providers throughout the state. Blue Shield of California is the only health plan offering its members home-based palliative care in all 58 counties in California.

This model of care features home visits from integrated teams that include physicians, nurses, social workers, chaplains, home health aides, and other specialists to form a comprehensive care team and support system for patients facing serious illness.

blueshieldca.com/palliativecare

About Blue Shield and Care1st

Blue Shield of California, an independent member of the Blue Shield Association, is a nonprofit health plan dedicated to providing Californians with access to high-quality health care at an affordable price.

As a nonprofit health plan guided by our mission and values, which encourage innovation and focus our efforts on transforming the current healthcare system into one that is worthy of our family and friends.

Care1st Health Plan was founded in 1994 by a group of providers, organized medical groups, and hospitals with the heart of the community at the forefront of their minds. This dynamic team came together to create a patient healthcare delivery system that has grown to over 500,000 members today. Now an affiliate of Blue Shield, Care1st offers Medi-Cal, CalMedConnect, Medicare Advantage HMO, and Dual Eligible Special Needs Plans.

Why palliative care is important

Palliative care is patient- and family-centered care that prioritizes quality of life and seeks to ease the symptoms of serious illness by addressing physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual needs.

Today, more than 90 million Americans live with serious illness, this number is likely to double by 2040.

Home-based palliative care reduces unnecessary ER visits and hospitalizations.

Our goals

• Provide our members and their caregivers access to comprehensive community-based palliative care programs
• Provide care at the right time, in the right setting and in accordance with our members’ wishes
• Create a robust, statewide network of community-based palliative care providers that is feasible, scalable, and replicable

Our approach

• Cross-train all Case & Utilization Managers in serious illness communication and clarifying goals of care
• Expedite prior-authorization process for needed services and supplies
• Partnerships with our provider groups and accountable care organizations (ACOs)
• Contract with community-based providers throughout the state of California that use an interdisciplinary team
• Established a per member per month (PMPM) case rate to support the program’s interdisciplinary team approach
• Partner with the Joint Commission, ACHC, The National Consensus Project, and others for community-based palliative care certification standards
• Training for our primary care providers (PCPs) and health system partners through our partners at VitalTalk, Common Practice, and CAPC

Results

• 30 California statewide contracted home-based palliative care providers (as of September 2018)
• 1,574 members served from program inception to August 2018
• 50% increase in hospice utilization
• 55% increase in average length of stay on hospice
• 90% of Blue Shield members enrolled in palliative care who have passed away did so at home, in accordance with their wishes