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What work is Optum Behavioral Health Solutions doing in the space to accelerate mental healthcare?

As we all know, mental health coverage and care delivery have become a central focus over the past few years due to massive growth in demand and ongoing capacity challenges. Federal, including Presidential State of the Union remarks in 2022, and state policymakers are calling for change. This growing importance has spotlighted and accelerated the need for improved access, quality, and integrated mental and physical health care. To deliver on this, Optum

Behavioral Health Solutions (OBHS) is building a combined coverage and care delivery model that integrates seamlessly with physical health to improve whole health through timely, equitable access to appropriate care. This is enabled by accelerating consumer access and time to care, deploying total cost of care solutions, and expanding value-based payment models.

What barriers need to be overcome to improve access to mental healthcare?

The mental health crisis in this country isn't new, and neither are many of the challenges people often face when it comes to accessing the right care for their needs. The pandemic has only accelerated/worsened the problem.

Growing demand: The numbers were already trending upward before 2020: from 2008 to 2019, the number of adults experiencing some type of mental illness increased almost 30% from 39.8 million to 51.5 million. That's around one-fifth of all adults in the U.S.



Not enough providers: At the same time, we're experiencing an ongoing shortage of mental health professionals available to meet this growing demand. More than two thirds of the U.S. population (72%) lives in an area where there are NOT enough psychiatrists and other mental health professionals available to meet the needs of the population. Optum is addresses this with a network that is one of the largest in the country with more than 300,000 providers nationally; offering more than 5,300 'Express Access' providers committed to seeing members within five business days (industry average is 14 days); virtual visits; digital tools/resources.

Persistent stigma: despite the fact that millions of Americans are struggling with their mental health, there's a lingering social stigma around these conditions that can lead people to avoid or delay seeking treatment because they're concerned about being treated differently, seen as weak, and losing relationships or even their livelihoods. We've made a lot of

progress in this area but there's still work to do around breaking down that stigma so people feel comfortable and empowered about seeking help when they need it, just like you would with a physical health problem.

Fragmented system: consumers seeking mental health support often encounter a fragmented system where finding care can be confusing. We need to make it easier for people to get the right care, at the right time, in the right setting – and deliver that care in a way that's coordinated with their other health needs so we're treating the whole person and not just their individual conditions. We also have to make it convenient and affordable, while providing personalized services tailored to meet their individual needs.

Social determinants of health (SDOH): treating the whole person and meeting their individual needs means we also have to consider the social, economic, and environmental factors that we know influence mental health outcomes – things like housing, education, employment, and social support systems that can all have a big impact on whether someone



seeks and stays engaged in treatment.

How can we move towards a continuum of care, from wellness and prevention to crisis intervention?

Continuum of care models must be centered around what matters most in behavioral health – people. We must create integrated care ecosystems where people feel seen, supported, and valued and that help democratize quality access. Mental health care should be intuitive, equitable and accessible for all. With personalized and connected experiences that provide measurable value for people throughout the entire journey. This is our passion, and it drives everything we do.

With our ability to reach into every aspect of the health care system, Optum is positioned to truly deliver on this promise. Through the solutions we're building, the partnerships we're creating, and the ways we're innovating to improve the

system we believe we can simplify the system so that people have multiple supports for wellness and prevention and can navigate to the right care in the moments that matter such as times of crisis or urgent need.

You can hear more from Trip Hofer at the **Future of Mental Healthcare East Summit** on April 19-20 in Boston, MA.

1 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Key Substance Use and Mental Health Indicators in the United States: Results From the 2019 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (HHS Publication No. PEP20-07-01-001, NSDUH Series H-55). Rockville, MD: Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, SAMHSA. <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/>.

2 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Key Substance Use and Mental Health Indicators in the United States: Results From the 2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (HHS Publication No. PEP21-07-01-003, NSDUH Series H-56). Rockville, MD: Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, SAMHSA. <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/>.

3 KFF. State Health Facts. Mental Health Care Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs) as of Sept. 30, 2021. San Francisco, CA: KFF. <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/mental-health-care-health-professional-shortage-areas-hpsas/>.