

Taking care to address mental health



Arkansas Blue Cross investing in behavioral health intervention programs

Prior to our state legislature convening its Behavioral Health task force to propose legislation for the upcoming session, Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield began making major investments to help address this pressing issue.

As we all know, Arkansas, like many other states, is in the midst of a behavioral health crisis that is impacting many facets of our lives. Mental health and substance use disorders have been on the rise and have increased even more since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Arkansas' behavioral health crisis

Here at home, the issue is particularly serious.

The Kaiser Family Foundation reports that incidents of **suicide**, along with symptoms of **anxiety** and **depression**, are prevalent in Arkansas at rates higher than the national average.

Many people in our state who need behavioral healthcare services are not receiving the help they need. As evidence of this care gap, **65.7%** of adolescents in Arkansas who experienced a **major depressive episode** reported that they **did not get treatment**. This statistic also is significantly higher than the national average.

And according to data from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, between 2016 and 2020, Arkansas had the **third-highest increase** in **childhood depression** and **anxiety** among the 50 states, behind only California and South Dakota.

Arkansas Blue Cross investments in better mental health

In July 2021, the Blue & You Foundation for a Healthier Arkansas awarded **\$5.29 million** in special grants for behavioral health-related programs in Arkansas and added more than **\$610,000** in 2022.

These investments support programs that address behavioral health at all stages of life – from early childhood through adolescence and into adulthood – and increase the number of behavioral health professionals serving our communities.

The Blue & You Foundation is a charitable organization established in 2001 and funded by Arkansas Blue Cross and Blue Shield to promote better health in Arkansas.

Here is a breakdown of these recent investments, which seek to equip behavioral health professionals and also improve and promote access to behavioral health services for Arkansans who need them:

2021 behavioral health investments

- **Arkansas Children's – \$1.5 million** to integrate the nationally recognized HealthySteps program in pediatric primary care facilities in Arkansas.
- **University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) – \$1.95 million** to expand The Trauma Resource Initiative for Schools and AR ConnectNow programs.
- **Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) endowments – \$1.735 million** to the following three universities to expand the behavioral health workforce and train these specialists to practice in primary care settings:
 - Arkansas State University at Jonesboro
 - University of Arkansas at Fayetteville
 - University of Arkansas at Little Rock

- **The Arkansas Chapter of The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI Arkansas) – \$105,000** to support the growth and maintenance of programs that provide resources to support individuals with mental health conditions and reduce stigma around the use of behavioral health services.

2022 behavioral health investments

- **Arkansas Rural Health Partnership (Lake Village) – \$150,000** to increase mental health resources for 12- to 18-year-olds living in rural parts of the state. At least 5,200 people will be trained to provide mental health and suicide prevention assistance.
- **City of Little Rock (Little Rock) – \$150,000** for the creation of a behavioral health initiative at Watson Elementary and enhance behavioral health outreach to families in four community schools.
- **Hispanic Community Services Inc. (Jonesboro) – \$39,633** to offer bilingual classes and host discussions regarding a variety of mental health topics.
- **Northwest Arkansas Crisis Intervention Center (Springdale) – \$5,000** to purchase a text messaging service to serve as a crisis line for people experiencing behavioral health emergencies.
- **Union Rescue Mission (Little Rock) – \$147,200** to provide temporary housing and mental health support for shelter residents as they transition out of Nehemiah House and Dorcas House.
- **United Way of Northwest Arkansas, Inc. (Lowell) – \$56,400** to expand the Arkansas 2-1-1 program, allowing Latinx populations to receive linguistically appropriate information about food assistance, behavioral health services and other community programs.
- **University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences (UAMS) – \$62,000** for the creation of a behavioral health integration training curriculum for social workers, psychologists and other mental health professionals at 19 UAMS primary care clinics.

In addition, Arkansas Blue Cross – from the outset of the pandemic – increased access to behavioral health services by adding coverage of remote delivery of behavioral health services via telehealth.

This commitment to promoting greater access to behavioral healthcare and a better state of mental health in Arkansas is part of our philosophy of whole-person health and our corporate mission to improve the health, financial security and peace of mind of the members and communities we serve.

If you have questions about our efforts to improve the behavioral health system in Arkansas, please feel free to give me a call or drop me a line.

Sincerely,

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