



Pension and Health Benefits Committee

Agenda Item 6a

August 20, 2019

Item Name: Mental Health: An Overview of Challenges and Innovations

Program: Health Benefits

Item Type: Information

Executive Summary

This item is an informational presentation focusing on the importance of mental health in overall health and wellness. It will provide an overview of mental health disorders, their social, financial, and physical impacts and will discuss barriers to achieve mental health wellness, including stigma and a shortage of mental health care providers. The presentation will also address California Public Employees' Retirement System (CalPERS) role in ensuring members receive high-quality mental health care, and how CalPERS is working strategically and innovatively with our health plans and other stakeholders to achieve mental and physical wellness for our members.

Strategic Plan

This item supports the CalPERS 2017-2022 Strategic Goal "Transform Health Care Purchasing and Delivery to Achieve Affordability."

Background

CalPERS and other health benefit purchasers play a role in the administration of mental health care benefits. The Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 (MHPAEA) required that by 2014 copayments and treatment limitations for medical and mental health care treatment be the same. Additionally, the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), which took effect January 1, 2014, includes mental health and substance abuse among the requirements that have to be covered by a certified health plan under the law. The parity law and coverage for mental health highlight the importance of the intertwined nature of mental and physical health and recognize that the mind and body must be treated holistically.

While the passage of the MHPAEA and the ACA have been instrumental in ensuring parity and access, more Californians are dealing with mental health issues and the stigma surrounding seeking treatment. Over the past several years, there have been multiple statewide efforts that have addressed eliminating stigma, facilitating greater access, and reducing the social, financial, and physical burden of mental illness in California.

Analysis

Mental health disorders are among the most common health conditions faced by Californians:

- Nearly 1 in 6 California adults experiences a mental illness of some kind;
- One in 24 has a serious mental illness that makes it difficult to carry out major life activities.
- One in 13 children has an emotional disturbance that limits participation in daily activities.

Approximately 4.7 percent of CalPERS members had depression in 2018, and approximately \$349 million was spent on mental health disorders for Basic members in 2018.

While mental health disorders are common in California and the United States, there are several challenges that patients, health plans, and purchasers face that may hinder access to high-quality services and treatment. These include stigma, lack of screening and early intervention, and workforce capacity issues, especially in rural areas.

CalPERS is holding its plans accountable as they are utilizing several methods to increase access to high-quality mental health services and overcome many of the challenges of mental health treatment. Some methods include improving screening and early intervention services, coordinating care through the integration of primary care and mental health services, and improving mental health care provider networks through tele-behavioral health services and increased therapist staffing.

CalPERS is committed to ensuring its health plans deliver the right mental health care at the right time, and is involved in several activities to continually improve mental health care for its members. CalPERS continues to be involved in Smart Care California's efforts to improve depression screening and treatment services.

Budget and Fiscal Impacts

Not applicable

Benefits and Risks

CalPERS must continue to stay focused on mental health and its deleterious effects, and ensure that screening and early detection continues to occur. CalPERS staff will continue to analyze and monitor trends in the mental health care of our members and hold its plans accountable. There is a financial risk of not caring for the mental and physical health of our members, as well as a societal risk.

Attachments

Attachment 1 – Mental Health: An Overview of Challenges and Innovations

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