

More Than Health Care Services: North Carolina's Focus on Improving Whole-person Health and Patient Experience

Karen E. Michael

North Carolina's transformation to Medicaid managed care is projected to improve health outcomes for the state's Medicaid population and elevate patient experience by integrating the social determinants of health into the state's care model and aligning state, provider, and health plan goals. This will increase access to timely, localized care services for members.

North Carolina is embarking on an ambitious transformation to Medicaid managed care. With this new program, the state's commitment to exceptional people-focused care is clearer than ever. The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NC DHHS) and Secretary Dr. Mandy Cohen present a vision for the state's managed care model that will help leverage and strengthen existing relationships among patients, providers, and NC DHHS while augmenting and enhancing local care management and community supports [1].

This transformation is also set to present greater opportunities to improve patient experience, which can be directly associated with key clinical implications, such as safety, efficiency, and quality [2]. As designed, North Carolina's transition to Medicaid managed care is a significant step for reaching the objectives of the Healthy North Carolina 2030 project by putting patients' needs first and encouraging the state's prepaid health plans (PHPs) to go beyond offering conventional medical benefits, with a keen focus on whole-person care and healthy opportunities [3]. As one of the state's five PHPs, AmeriHealth Caritas North Carolina will be working with the state on its efforts to build upon the strong foundation that has already been established.

Focusing on the Whole Person

Access to proper health care services is an important part of improving patient experience, but it is insufficient in itself to ensure improved health outcomes at the population level [4]. To bring care full circle, NC DHHS has placed an emphasis on various social factors, or social determinants of health, that influence a person's health, beyond what happens within the four walls of a doctor's office. Many of these social determinants of health, when left unaddressed, yield a

high-utilizer population that receives lower-quality care and suffers from poorer health outcomes than their counterparts who have fewer unaddressed social barriers [5]. These factors make the focus of social determinants of health a central part of the Medicaid managed care model and a vital component of streamlining a whole-person health experience.

With this in mind, NC DHHS has designed its Medicaid managed care program around the Advanced Medical Home (AMH) model, a model of care led by a health care provider who offers continuous, coordinated care and arranges further necessary services with other qualified professionals to maximize health outcomes [6]. This team-based model will provide a central channel for delivering high-touch care management, assist the state in streamlining care team tasks, help providers prioritize patient interventions, and increase data collection and sharing [7]. In conjunction, NC DHHS has developed the Healthy Opportunities Pilots to "... test and evaluate the impact of providing select evidence-based, non-medical interventions related to housing, food, transportation, and interpersonal safety to high-needs Medicaid enrollees" [8]. As an integral part of this model, AmeriHealth Caritas North Carolina will collaborate with the AMH program and associated clinically integrated networks, as well as train our local staff to recognize the presence and impact of the social determinants of health (including trauma) and better understand viable pathways of support. In our other markets, AmeriHealth Caritas has had great success in integrating the social determinants of health into our population health management and member engagement strategies. We do this by screening for unmet social needs and collaborating with community stakeholders, such as food pantries and shelters, to leverage crucial resources and supports.

Through North Carolina's new Medicaid managed care program, members will receive the same medical benefits as

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Address correspondence to Karen E. Michael, AmeriHealth Caritas North Carolina, 8041 Arco Corporate Drive, Raleigh, NC 27617 (kmi-michael@amerihealthcaritas.com).

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in previous years' Medicaid fee-for-service model. In addition, NC DHHS has invited PHPs to submit value-added benefits that go beyond program standards, address the social determinants of health, and increase the focus on non-medical needs at the foundation of people's well-being.

Improving Provider Support and Patient Experience

Because providers are such an essential component of the health care system, provider satisfaction and the support they receive from PHPs can directly affect health outcomes and overall patient experience. To best support the state's AMH model and prioritize localized care, PHPs are primed to help network providers maintain existing doctor-patient relationships and enhance care management [9]. By working together and focusing on the mutual success of all parties involved in a member's care, PHPs can help providers and other stakeholders further align with state goals and promote quality care.

AmeriHealth Caritas is committed to helping providers every step of the way with data sharing and practice transformation support via PerformPlus, AmeriHealth Caritas's suite of value-based incentive programs. PerformPlus delivers on AmeriHealth Caritas's strategic goal to increase access to actionable data and is designed to improve integration of care, avoid waste and duplication of care, bring cost trends in line with or below inflation, and help improve members' experience within the health care system.

Offering provider compensation through a value-based structure is just one of the ways we strive to reward providers for quality care. By virtue of this transformation, PHPs like AmeriHealth Caritas North Carolina can help further integrate whole-person health services, address the social determinants of health, improve quality ratings, reduce overuse of high-risk medications, and align incentives with metrics important to NC DHHS and our provider networks.

Keeping the Heart of North Carolina's Specialized Care Model

PHPs are coming into North Carolina's Medicaid managed care market with an incredible foundation from which to work, established by the state's AMH model, local care management, a team-based model for person-centered care, and other best practices adopted by NC DHHS [10]. This history of advancements in health care has laid the groundwork for the incoming PHPs and will help them through the program launch without the need to implement program changes or risk disruption in care.

Although new to the North Carolina market, AmeriHealth Caritas is a national company known for building a local presence within the communities we serve across the United States. From hiring local workers to collaborating with local organizations to streamline access to community resources, we are committed to the state of North Carolina and its residents. In addition to working with clinically integrated networks for care management functions, our feet-

on-the-street approach uses community health navigators who locate hard-to-reach members and visit them at their provider offices or in their homes. Members will also have access to a team of care connectors who assist with non-clinical tasks, such as arranging transportation, scheduling medical appointments, and coordinating durable medical equipment. These teams will work to provide members with seamless wraparound services and added support to help ensure they get the care they need when and where they need it.

Providing North Carolinians with a Pathway Toward Independence

NC DHHS, in the thoughtful design of its Medicaid managed care program, has cleared the path for Medicaid members to take control of their health, realize positive health experiences, and improve their well-being. Whole-person, integrated health care, as the state envisions it, should improve patient experiences and play an important role in achieving operational excellence and driving quality outcomes.

This is an exciting time for NC DHHS and the stakeholders in the North Carolina Medicaid program. AmeriHealth Caritas North Carolina is proud to be a participant in this pivotal moment in time and collaborate with the state to help improve the health of North Carolinians while working to create a care model where patient experience is rooted in accessibility, compassion, and quality. **NCMJ**

Karen E. Michael, RN, MSN, MBA vice president, Population Health Programs, AmeriHealth Caritas North Carolina, Raleigh, North Carolina.

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