Fighting the opioid epidemic at Independence Blue Cross

At Independence Blue Cross, fighting the opioid crisis is one of our top priorities. As we head into the new year, we will continue to focus our attention and energies on exploring every option available to address this devastating issue. This includes building on an already comprehensive set of campaigns, partnerships, and policies to prevent opioid overuse and addiction and steer those in need into treatment.

Here is a summary of those efforts:

**Limiting initial opioid supplies**

In July 2017, Independence became one of the first insurers in the country to restrict first-time, low-dose opioid prescriptions to a five-day supply limit, with an exemption for patients with cancer or on hospice. This policy change resulted in a substantial reduction in opioid use and prescriptions. Since 2014, Independence has seen a 38 percent reduction in opioid users (36,000 fewer members), a 43 percent reduction in opioid prescriptions (80,000 total), and a 17 percent reduction in the morphine equivalent dose.

**Supporting treatment options**

- No prior authorizations are needed for Vivitrol and Suboxone, two of the most common medication-assisted treatments. We also cover methadone, which is another option for treating opioid addiction.
- There is no member cost-sharing (after deductibles) for injectable and nasal spray formulations of naloxone and Narcan (a brand of naloxone).
- Nearly 100 substance abuse rehabilitation facilities and more than 5,000 behavioral health providers are in our network.
- We will introduce a new acupuncture benefit to provide alternative treatment for specific pain conditions, beginning in early 2019.
- We have an online self-help tool for Independence members with Magellan behavioral health that addresses multiple conditions, including substance abuse. The tool is free and available on our member portal at ibxpress.com.

**Changing physician prescribing habits**

Independence shares the Centers for Disease Control opioid prescribing guidelines with our network providers. In addition, we gave detailed reports to more than 1,000 prescribing doctors about their patients (our members) who exceeded the recommended morphine equivalent dose. This outreach led to nearly 60 percent of those doctors changing or decreasing their prescribing habits over six months.

**Supporting community efforts on awareness and education**

The Independence Blue Cross Foundation’s Supporting Treatment and Overdose Prevention (STOP) Initiative is working to increase awareness and access to effective community-based opioid treatment and prevention through these and other initiatives:

- **Someone You Know**, a research initiative with the Justice Center for Research at Penn State University for a multimedia public awareness campaign to share real stories of addiction and recovery — through print, video, and community events — to reduce the stigma often associated with opioid abuse
- A regional study to evaluate “warm hand-off” pilot programs that connect overdose victims immediately with recovery programs
- A partnership with Walgreens that adds new drug take-back kiosks in five Walgreens stores in Philadelphia, Bucks, and Delaware counties
- **Someone You Know: Facing the Opioid Crisis Together** conference — we welcomed national experts, including the U.S. Surgeon General, and more than 600 guests to this conference aimed at sharing strategies that promote improving the health of individuals and communities affected by the opioid epidemic