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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Neighborhood Health Plan Launches Pilot Programs to Aid Recovery of Patients with Serious Mental Illnesses and Substance Use Disorder

March 29, 2016 (BOSTON) – Neighborhood Health Plan (NHP) a pioneering leader in addressing the social and behavioral determinants of health, announced today it is funding two innovative pilot programs with its behavioral health partner Beacon Health Options (Beacon) to provide peer support to fill the unmet medical needs of patients who suffer from substance use disorders and serious and persistent mental illnesses.

One pilot program launched by NHP and Beacon called Here-for-YouSM aims to reach up to 10,000 NHP members suffering with serious and persistent mental illness, specifically Psychotic or Bipolar Disorders. A second program funded by NHP and Beacon and run by Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) provides peer support in community health centers in the form of “recovery coaches” for those struggling to recover from substance use.

NHP is the first health plan in Massachusetts to fund care coordinators at behavioral health providers for this population. These care coordinators provide important links across the health delivery system on behalf of patients who often fall through the cracks because of their unique behavioral health challenges.

The physical health of those with schizophrenia, bipolar disease, substance use and other serious and persistent mental illnesses is negatively impacted when they do not make it to doctors’ appointments, neglect to take prescribed medications, and fail to get necessary medical care. When these patients do seek medical attention it is often in more expensive emergency or acute settings.

Patient care coordinators operating out of community health centers and community mental health centers are now working with NHP members to ensure they follow through on comprehensive treatment plans, individualized to their physical and behavioral health needs, which have been developed in consultation with doctors, therapists, hospitals, and other providers. Peer supports funded by NHP and Beacon also assist patients in securing their immediate needs for housing, transportation, food, income, and other daily necessities that can impact health.

“These creative initiatives are logical extensions of the integration of behavioral health and physical health that has been a defining approach of NHP since our

company's inception," said Dr. Paul Mendis, Chief Medical Officer for NHP. "Our experience shows that you can't treat a patient's immediate illness or medical needs successfully unless you simultaneously manage the non-medical factors in their environments that result in poor health. Those factors can include the lack of a job, transportation, a warm place to sleep at night, or the debilitating aspects of mental illness."

Here-for-You provides care coordinators in community mental health centers where these patients receive most of their care. Integrated teams target a patient's most immediate and crucial needs, then customize a culturally and linguistically-appropriate treatment plan that links medical, community-based and behavioral health services.

The goal of Here-for-You is to improve health outcomes and reduce emergency room and acute hospital admissions. This program improves the communication and coordination between behavioral and physical health care providers to ensure patients do not fall through the cracks as they transition between different kinds of care.

In addition to funding and training care coordinators who will be employed by the community-based clinics, NHP and Beacon will also train health center staff, provide technical assistance, and make its team of registered nurses and nurse practitioners available to ensure those with serious mental issues also receive the primary care they need.

"The Here-For-You program is the gold standard for the direction health care needs to take," said Dr. Emma Stanton, Associate Chief Medical Officer for Beacon Health Options. "The program is health care integration at its best. It focuses as much on social complexity as addressing behavioral and physical health needs with equal emphasis. Through Here-For-You, this vulnerable population will get the care they deserve and achieve outcomes that matter, such as having somewhere to live and someone to talk to."

The Recovery Coach Program launched by MGH and supported by NHP and Beacon seeks to reduce recidivism among people with substance use disorders through a peer-to-peer connection. These individuals, who are state trained and certified, understand the barriers to recovery some substance users face because the coaches themselves are in recovery. NHP and Beacon fund a position, which is not reimbursed by MassHealth, that supports services in MGH's community health centers, downtown practices, and Everett site.

"Our approach to providing peer supports is a potential game-changing innovation in the treatment of substance use. These advocates are the glue linking the various parts of the health care system together, providing encouragement and a role model who's been on this journey, survived and thrived," says Dr. Martha Kane, Clinical Director for MGH's Center for Addiction Medicine.

Inspired by the sponsorship model familiar to Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, the Recovery Coach Program aims to improve treatment and reduce costs by providing patients who are difficult to reach and treat with trusted advocates. These advocates will work with physicians and therapists to develop a comprehensive treatment plan and then do the necessary follow-up to ensure that patients don't regress when they are discharged from the hospital or complete a treatment program.

The recovery coaches also work with high-risk patients to resolve any legal, financial, employment, transportation, or lifestyle issues that might trigger a relapse.

About NHP

Neighborhood Health Plan ([NHP](#)) is an NCQA-accredited, not-for-profit health plan that provides coverage to over 450,000 Commercial and MassHealth members. For 30 years, employers, individuals, and families across Massachusetts have turned to NHP for health care coverage that is both high-quality and affordable. NHP is known for plans that are easy-to-understand and manage. Members have access to a robust network of top doctors, community health centers, and academic and regional hospitals. Founded in 1986 with a commitment to promote health equity for members within the diverse communities we serve, NHP's service and care management programs today continue the tradition of personalized and high-quality care. NHP is a member of Partners HealthCare.

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