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Neighborhood Health Plan Targets Opioid Epidemic by Increasing Access to Life-Saving Treatments

First Health Plan in Country to Provide Financial Incentives to Increase Suboxone Prescribers

May 18, 2018 (SOMERVILLE, MA) – Neighborhood Health Plan (NHP) announced today it is launching an industry-leading initiative to support recovery and help reduce the number who die each year from opioid overdoses by addressing the critical shortage of clinicians currently allowed to prescribe life-saving treatments like Suboxone and other buprenorphine products to those struggling with substance use disorders.

A contributing cause of the nationwide opioid epidemic is the fact that more than half of the estimated 2.5 million people with substance use disorders in the U.S. are without reliable access to medications that might lead to recovery and save their lives. Last year, opioid-related overdoses claimed the lives of nearly 2,000 in Massachusetts alone.

To fill the need for additional practitioners who can treat substance use disorders, NHP will now provide financial incentives to enable more prescribers to be trained and certified to prescribe buprenorphine products, such as Suboxone and other medication-assisted treatments. Hoping to recruit as many as 100 prescribers, NHP will pay \$500 to offset the cost of the training required for dispensing these prescription drugs. As a further incentive, NHP will provide a \$2,000 honorarium to practitioners who have treated at least 10 patients after becoming certified. NHP is the first health plan in the nation to offer this incentive.

“Facing a major public health issue that has claimed so many lives, we need to invest quickly in the policies, treatments, and institutional knowledge that we know will help combat this epidemic,” said **NHP President and CEO David Segal**. “The magnitude, complexity, and tragic consequences of opioid use require action and approaches that challenge the status quo. There is an opportunity for the entire health care industry to step up to the plate and work together to develop new, creative, and effective ways to solve this crisis.”

In addition to increasing the number of practitioners able to prescribe buprenorphine products, including Suboxone and other medication-assisted treatment, NHP is making those medications more accessible for doctors and patients alike. NHP has no prior authorization requirements for Suboxone and the generic buprenorphine

prescriptions that are used in treating the cravings and withdrawal symptoms associated with opioid dependency.

Additionally, NHP will waive member co-pays for Narcan and the generic equivalent naloxone, used to revive those who have overdosed on opiates. Pharmacists will also be reminded to notify NHP members they are eligible for free supplies of life-saving Narcan whenever they pick up a prescription for high-dose narcotic painkillers.

To provide follow-up care, NHP is also hiring two specially trained and certified recovery coaches who work with at-risk patients to prevent life-threatening relapses. While the hiring of recovery coaches by provider organizations is not unusual, NHP is the first health plan in the country to do so.

“To combat this epidemic, we need a customized approach that addresses the unique circumstances and needs of individuals wherever they are on the spectrum of addiction and recovery,” said **Tony Dodek, MD, NHP’s Chief Medical Officer**. “Our clinical team has designed a comprehensive, evidence-based strategy for improving access to resources with a proven track record of saving lives and breaking the cycles of opioid dependency. These initiatives reflect NHP’s belief that a customer-centric approach begins with recruiting practitioners able to offer a full range of addiction treatments, and extends to on-the-ground reinforcement through one-on-one interactions with those dealing with substance use disorders.”

Last year, the Centers for Disease Control reported about 42,000 people died nationwide from overdoses of heroin and other opiates. This marks a tripling of opioid-related fatalities since 2002. And it is estimated that approximately 2 million Americans struggle with substance use disorders. At the same time, just 32,000 doctors and nurses are available to prescribe medications that treat opiate addiction.

NHP’s new initiatives are consistent with and support other efforts, such as RIZE Massachusetts, that are developing innovative programs to help those with substance use disorders recover their lives. Launched last year by leading independent non-profit organizations, RIZE Massachusetts hopes to raise \$50 million in the next three years to finance promising treatments in the fight against opiate addiction. The campaign has been embraced by political leaders who’ve made reducing opioid-related deaths a top priority, among them: Governor Charlie Baker, Attorney General Maura Healey and Boston Mayor Marty Walsh.

“The opioid epidemic is the among most urgent public health crises that society faces today,” **David Torchiana, M.D., President and CEO of Partners HealthCare and board chair of RIZE Massachusetts**. “We have an obligation to bring every tool that medical science has available to combat this epidemic and help those suffering from substance use disorder heal and start on the road to full recovery.

The initiatives that NHP has crafted will help improve the quality of life for countless families across the Commonwealth.”

About NHP

Neighborhood Health Plan (NHP) is an NCQA-accredited, not-for-profit health plan that provides coverage to commercial and MassHealth members. For more than 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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