KEY DRIVERS AND EVIDENCE

For Integrating Behavioral Health

Reduced Costs

Patients with behavioral health conditions can cost three times as much as patients without a behavioral health condition.[1] The addition of a behavioral health condition to one or more chronic physical conditions results in a sixty to seventy-five percent increase in health care costs per individual.[2] Depression alone has been linked to 50-100% higher direct and indirect costs.[3]

Integrated behavioral health can decrease overall medical costs through a variety of ways, including decreasing unnecessary use of emergency room and high-cost specialty care, improving adherence and lifestyle factors that contribute to physical illness, reducing sick days at work, and decreasing physician's workload. Annual cost savings of integrated physical and behavioral health services have been estimated at $26-$48 billion dollars.[1]

Improved Health Outcomes

When healthcare providers practice in their own siloes, they focus on specific physical or behavioral health symptoms instead of taking a whole person approach, resulting in poorer health outcomes.[4] Overall, people with serious behavioral health difficulties have a shorter overall life expectancy, which is actually attributable to physical illnesses accrued in their lifetime.[5] Moreover, financial and stigma barriers often preclude a person from getting the necessary care.

Integrated behavioral health can improve overall health outcomes. Eliminating historically separate funding streams for physical and behavioral health eliminates common financial barriers to receiving appropriate care. A team-based, collaborative approach allows providers and practice teams to take a whole-person approach to care. This approach also decreases mental health stigma by normalizing the presence of behavioral health providers as part of the care team instead of a referral to follow-up with. A Cochrane review of trials for patients with depression and anxiety treated in a collaborative, integrated system found improvements in both clinical outcomes as well as overall patient satisfaction.[6]

Greater Access to Care

Behavioral health services are often most needed and accessed outside of traditional mental health care settings. 31% of adult primary care visits are related to mental health,[7] however, two thirds of primary care providers report poor access to referrals for needed behavioral health services.[8] For children, while 70-80% of youth who obtain behavioral health services do so in school settings,9,10 nearly 80% of youth with mental health needs still do not receive treatment.[11]

Integrating behavioral health providers in hospitals and practices increases access dramatically. No longer are physical and behavioral health services offered at different locations and in different systems of care; now whole person care is available within one appointment.

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