

The Collaborative Care Model (CoCM)

Expanding Access to Effective Mental Health Care – Support HB 178



Mental health conditions are common, costly, and often untreated. **One in five adults in the U.S.** is impacted by a mental health condition, yet nearly **half of people with depression never receive treatment**. Many patients first seek help from their **primary care provider (PCP)**, but barriers like workforce shortages, stigma, long wait times, and limited specialty access prevent timely care.

The **Collaborative Care Model (CoCM)** bridges this gap by integrating behavioral health into primary care—delivering evidence-based, team-based mental health care where patients already are.

What Is the Collaborative Care Model?

CoCM is a proven, integrated approach to treating common mental health conditions in primary care. Care is delivered by a **team**, led by the PCP and supported by:

- **Behavioral Health Care Manager (BHCM)** – provides frequent patient contact, care coordination, brief interventions, and outcome tracking
- **Psychiatric Consultant** – offers case review and treatment recommendations to the care team
- **Patient Registry** – tracks symptoms, treatment response, and outcomes to ensure measurement-based care

This model allows psychiatric expertise to reach many more patients through consultation and collaboration—rather than one-to-one specialty visits alone.

How the Team Works Together

- **Patient-centered care:** The patient remains at the center of the care team
- **Frequent contact:** Patients have regular touchpoints with the BHCM and PCP
- **Infrequent but high-impact contact:** Psychiatrists support care through consultation, not routine visits
- **Measurement-based treatment:** Progress is tracked in a registry using validated tools
- **Stepped care:** Treatment is adjusted until clinical goals are met

This approach expands access while maintaining high-quality, coordinated care.

Why CoCM Works

- **Strong evidence base:** Supported by more than **80 randomized clinical trials**
- **Improved access:** Delivers timely, effective mental health care in primary care settings
- **Reduced stigma:** Normalizes mental health treatment alongside medical care
- **Better outcomes:** Engages patients and improves symptom control and functioning

The Economic Case for CoCM

- Mental health conditions cost the U.S. economy an estimated **\$210 billion annually**
- For every **\$1 invested** in CoCM, there is an estimated **\$6.50 return** in improved health and productivity
- Employers can see an average savings of **\$1,815 per employee per year** through reduced health care costs and improved productivity
- Builds long-term primary care capacity through ongoing knowledge transfer from psychiatric consultants

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Benefits of the Collaborative Care Model

- Timely, effective, and integrated mental health care delivered in primary care settings
- Strong accountability for quality through team-based, measurement-driven care
- Expanded reach of behavioral health specialists by pairing psychiatric expertise with primary care
- Reduced wait times and improved care coordination for patients
- Improved outcomes for depression and anxiety, including higher response and remission rates
- Ability to tailor care for diverse and underserved populations, helping reduce health inequities

What Can Be Done to Expand Access?

Support policies that:

- Require all payers to reimburse **Psychiatric Collaborative Care Management (CoCM) billing codes**
- Improve access to mental health and substance use disorder treatment
- Remain **budget-neutral** while expanding care capacity

Health Plan Endorsement of CoCM

National health insurers have publicly endorsed the Collaborative Care Model as an effective, scalable solution to the mental health access crisis.

In a 2022 letter to Congress, the **Blue Cross Blue Shield Association (BCBSA)**—representing 34 independent, community-based health plans serving one in three Americans—expressed support for legislation promoting the Collaborative Care Model. BCBSA described CoCM as a **team-centered, evidence-based approach** that integrates care across providers, patients, families, and communities and helps address behavioral health workforce shortages.

BCBSA highlighted that CoCM:

- Improves access to behavioral health care by embedding services in primary care
- Eliminates long wait times to see behavioral health providers
- Increases mental health screening and early intervention
- Improves coordination for patients with comorbid physical and behavioral health conditions
- Demonstrates improved clinical outcomes, including higher response and remission rates
- Can be culturally tailored to reach underserved populations and reduce health inequities

This endorsement reinforces that CoCM is aligned with payer priorities for **quality, access, and value-based care**.