

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Blue Cross/Blue Shield Florida Reimbursement Rate Cuts Hinder Mental Health Services

TALLAHASSEE - On June 1, 2017, New Directions, which manages behavioral health services for Florida Blue (Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida), notified all of their contracted Psychologists and Master's-Level Providers about limited rate modifications that will take effect October 1, 2017. The deadline is now October 13 because of the hurricanes.

These rate modifications equate to a 35 percent reduction in reimbursement rates for Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSW), Licensed Mental Health Counselors (LMCH), and Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists (LMFT) and 30 percent reduction in reimbursement rate from psychologist. New Directions claims these rate cuts will not cause patients to be forced to leave treatment. According to a memo from Darryl Donlin, LCSW, MBA, Vice President, Network Operations: "Absolutely not. New Directions will work closely with providers and members to ensure the patient/provider relationship is preserved while care is brought to a clinically appropriate conclusion or safely transferred to an in-network provider." However, reality shows a different scenario.

Because there is no negotiation for this change, providers must take or leave it. With many mental health providers barely breaking even, many will opt to leave this network. With no in-network mental health providers available, people will be forced to leave treatment. For example, Monarch Wellness (MW) in Naples, FL, had one therapist resigned when the reduced rate notice was sent and is at risk of losing others. Kimberly Rogers, LCSW, RPT-S who oversees MW, said, "I've talked with our therapists about how compensation will likely need to be adjusted to manage overhead, and am at risk of more experienced quality therapists leaving because of the pay decrease." Exacerbating the rate cuts is ND's network is closed and ND is not accepting new therapist into their network.

Jim Akin, ACSW, NASW-FL Executive Director said, "Half of all Floridians will experience mental illness at least once in their lifetime. Florida already ranks 49th of 50 states in per capita spending on mental health. The bottom line is rate cuts will affect services and service delivery."

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