

CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield Accelerates Over \$170 Million in Payments and Support to Healthcare Providers in Response to Coronavirus Pandemic

Funds will help provide financial relief for providers throughout the Mid-Atlantic region

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Baltimore, Md./Washington, D.C. – Today, CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield (CareFirst) announced it will offer a new accelerated payment program to an array of healthcare providers experiencing financial strain due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This initiative is part of CareFirst's ongoing commitment to support the communities it serves as they navigate the complexities of this public health crisis. CareFirst's combined provider-focused efforts will result in over \$170 million in direct support of the healthcare delivery system during the pandemic.

Cases of COVID-19 continue to rise, contributing to financial pressures across our community, including to our healthcare provider organizations and individual practices. Declines in patient visits and physicians being required to cease elective procedures during this pandemic have combined to impact many independent practices. In response to this disruption, CareFirst will continue to aid a large number of provider organizations in Maryland, the District of Columbia, and Northern Virginia that are part of CareFirst's Patient-Centered Medical Home (PCMH) program, as well as independent practices in certain specialty areas. To allow more providers the immediate financial means to care for patients, CareFirst is accelerating funds that would otherwise not be available during the pandemic or have been paid later in 2020 and 2021. CareFirst will offer a combination of:

- Advance lump-sum payments, increased fee schedules and monthly cash advances for qualifying PCMH panels;
- Monthly cash advances for pediatricians and rural primary care physicians who need additional assistance, independent practices in certain specialty areas, and dentists; and,
- Cash advances to select hospitals demonstrating need in Maryland, the District of Columbia, and Northern Virginia.

"Healthcare providers are on the frontlines of this public health crisis, working to fulfill a critical need," said CareFirst CEO and President, Brian D. Pieninck. "Providing quality care to members and communities throughout our region is a shared responsibility, not just related to COVID-19, but well beyond this pandemic. By providing accelerated payments and other immediate support, we hope to meaningfully mitigate the financial impact local practitioners are facing so they can continue to provide high-quality care to patients now and into the future."

Providers eligible for accelerated payments should visit CareFirst's [website](#) during the week of April 13th for eligibility information and instructions for next steps.

This announcement is the most recent in a series of CareFirst's ongoing efforts to rapidly address the urgent needs our local providers face as a result of COVID-19, which include:

- The launch of an online [resource guide](#) detailing direct payments, grants and loan opportunities available for providers and hospitals;
- A collaborative public-private partnership with Baltimore City and local hospitals to expand citywide capacity response to COVID-19 pandemic;
- Enhanced coverage and expanded reimbursement policies for virtual visits and telephonic consultations;
- Elimination of prior authorizations for tests or treatments that are medically necessary and consistent with CDC guidance for members diagnosed with COVID-19;
- Introduction of a volunteer program available for CareFirst's licensed clinicians to volunteer their services to support direct patient care and alleviate the widespread strain on provider organizations;
- Adjustment of several utilization management policies and practices to assist health care providers during the crisis; and,
- Ongoing outreach to at-risk populations so they are better prepared to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic and potential healthcare support.

CareFirst has also worked to proactively mitigate the financial impact this crisis is having on its members and accounts. Last month, the company implemented a [premium deferment program](#) where premiums can be deferred for up to two months with repayment spread over the balance of the member's contract. Members experiencing difficulties with payment can visit CareFirst's [website](#) to learn more about how to apply for assistance. Employers should contact their broker, CareFirst representative or visit CareFirst's [website](#).

CareFirst remains committed to helping alleviate the pressure and economic hardships placed on our communities as a result of COVID-19, and continues to assess how the company can provide support to healthcare providers throughout the region. Visit CareFirst's [website](#) to remain up to date on the latest information.

About CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield

In its 83rd year of service, CareFirst, an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, is a not-for-profit healthcare company which, through its affiliates and subsidiaries, offers a comprehensive portfolio of health insurance products and administrative services to 3.3 million individuals and employers in Maryland, the District of Columbia and Northern Virginia. In 2019, CareFirst invested \$43 million to improve overall health, and increase the accessibility, affordability, safety and quality of healthcare throughout its market areas. To learn more about CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield, visit our website at www.carefirst.com or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#) or [Instagram](#).

Serving Maryland, the District of Columbia and portions of Virginia, CareFirst BlueCross BlueShield is the shared business name of CareFirst of Maryland, Inc. and Group Hospitalization and Medical Services, Inc. In the District of Columbia and Maryland, CareFirst MedPlus is the business name of First Care, Inc. In Virginia, CareFirst MedPlus is the business name of First Care, Inc. of Maryland (Used in VA by: First Care, Inc.). First Care, Inc., CareFirst of Maryland, Inc., Group Hospitalization and Medical Services, Inc. CareFirst BlueChoice, Inc. and The Dental Network are independent licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. The Blue Cross® and Blue Shield® and the Cross and Shield Symbols are registered service marks of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, an association of independent Blue Cross and Blue Shield Plans.

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