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Massachusetts Health Survey Reveals Deep Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Behavioral Health

1 in 4 Adults Who Needed Care Got None; Greater Impact Among People of Color

BOSTON (Feb. 8, 2022) – The [Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation](#) released survey findings today that provide the first comprehensive picture of behavioral health needs among Massachusetts adults and their persistent challenges in accessing mental health care and substance use disorder treatment during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the [Massachusetts Health Survey](#) – commissioned by the Foundation to better understand behavioral health needs and the gaps in the health delivery system amid the pandemic – more than 1 in 3 adults reported needing behavioral health care for themselves or a family member over the prior 12 months.

Among those who reported needing behavioral health care, 26% did not receive any behavioral health care. The level of need was disproportionately higher among younger adults (age 19-39), among people of color, and among populations with lower-income. Those surveyed cited affordability, accessibility and stigma as barriers to getting behavioral health care.

Echoing earlier research, nearly half (49%) of respondents reported job losses or disruptions, and 28% said they consumed alcohol or cannabis more frequently after the pandemic began. Of concern, almost one in five adults (17%) reported their consumption of alcohol or cannabis had caused serious problems with their personal responsibilities at home, work or school over the previous 12 months.

“The survey clearly shows that what was an urgent need already before the pandemic has reached a level of crisis across our state, particularly in communities of color,” said Audrey Shelto, President and CEO of the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation. “In my decades of working on behavioral health issues in the Commonwealth, I have never seen such consensus on the degree of the problem and how to address it. The Baker administration, state Legislature and federal government have all proposed solutions and funding. Now is the time to act.”



The survey is the first to provide a clear snapshot of behavioral health care needs among a broad group of Massachusetts adults during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Foundation’s consultant, [NORC at the University of Chicago](#), an independent, non-partisan research institution, fielded the survey between December 2020 and March 2021, and responses have a 12-month look-back period.

“This quantitative data supports the challenges our health center staff has witnessed on a daily basis,” said Dr. Carlos F. Cappas, Chief Behavioral Health Officer at Lynn Community Health Center. “The demands on our services are outpacing the supply and we need additional sources of care to address the wide range of behavioral health concerns in the communities we serve.”

Other key findings from the Massachusetts Health Survey include:

- Fewer than half (43%) of the Massachusetts adults who needed behavioral health services reported receiving behavioral health care and always being able to obtain an appointment when they needed care.
- 64% who reported a need for behavioral health care indicated their need was due to, or exacerbated by, the pandemic.
- More than 1 in 4 (27%) Massachusetts adults expected to need behavioral health care over the subsequent six months. However, nearly one-fifth of those adults did not report needing care over the previous 12 months – representing many new people looking for services.

The full report can be found online at the following link:

<https://www.bluecrossmafoundation.org/publication/behavioral-health-during-first-year-covid-19-pandemic-update-need-and-access-0>

About the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation

The mission of the [Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation](#) is to expand access to health care for low-income and vulnerable individuals and families in the Commonwealth. The Foundation was founded in 2001 with an initial endowment from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts. It operates separately from the company and is governed by its own Board of Directors.

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