

CRAIN'S
Health Pulse

Providers still challenged by billing for behavioral health

Small medical practices attempting to integrate behavioral health and primary care have made progress by using a framework developed by United Hospital Fund-supported researchers, according to a [report](#) UHF released Wednesday. However, both primary care and behavioral health providers said the inability to get reimbursed properly still hinders their efforts.

"Providers lack a clear understanding of billing requirements that are often seen as vague, inconsistent, inadequate and potentially unsustainable," read the report, authored by researchers from Montefiore Health System and the Department of Psychiatry at Columbia University.

While the situation is starting to improve, payers still need to be more proactively involved in addressing billing issues and incentivizing screenings and other activities related to behavioral health integration, the report said.

It highlighted the work of Empire BlueCross BlueShield as an example of the steps payers can take to encourage integration.

For instance, Empire has promoted the use of Health & Behavioral Assessment and Intervention billing codes, which permit "a referral by a medical provider to a behavioral health provider even if a patient has not yet manifested symptoms of a formal mental disorder," the insurer said.