

CRAIN'S
Health Pulse

Business group tapped to lead tristate's mental health work

The Northeast Business Group on Health will lead new efforts to improve mental health and substance-use care in New York, northern New Jersey and southern Connecticut.

NEBGH told *Crain's* it has been selected to do so as part of the five-year, private sector initiative the Path Forward for Mental Health and Substance Use. The program was launched last month by the National Alliance of Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions, the American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychiatric Association Foundation Center for Workplace Mental Health and Meadow Mental Health Policy Institute.

NEBGH will lead one of the initiative's eight Regional Employer Stakeholder Engagement Teams, or RESET, regions. The goal is to leverage the influence of employer and other health care purchaser members to work with health plans, hospital systems, consultants and other stakeholders to better address the ongoing public health crisis. (A recent report from Seattle-based consulting firm Milliman found that the crisis is getting worse when it comes to accessing the right care at the right time, and patients are more likely to resort to out-of-network providers for behavioral health care than for other care.)

"It's going to take a major effort on behalf of all stakeholders involved to solve this," said Candice Sherman, CEO of NEBGH. "The priorities set forth as part of this effort, and the fact that it's purchaser driven, are really going to make a difference."

The priorities are to improve access to in-network behavioral health specialists, expand the use of the collaborative care model to integrate behavioral health care into primary care, implement measurement-based care in both of those areas, expand tele-behavioral health and ensure mental health parity compliance.

"These employers are the primary financiers of the system, and they will both set the tone and hold the stakeholders accountable for accomplishing these goals," said Michael Thompson, president and CEO of the National Alliance of Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions, in a statement.

Efforts also have started in California, the District of Columbia, Florida, Kansas, Maryland, Minnesota, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia.

The Path Forward is pursuing funding from a number of sources nationally, and RESET regions are expected to raise funding in their area.