

Health Systems Create New Care Programs as They Renew Contracts with Insurers

Empire BlueCross BlueShield, part of Anthem, on Monday [announced](#) that it has reached a multiyear contract agreement with Mount Sinai Health System. That same day, UnitedHealthcare said it has renewed its network relationship with Northwell Health. There was a commonality in both renewals: commitments to value-based payment models to improve care quality and innovative programs to expand services, especially in light of Covid-19.

UnitedHealthcare's renewed contract is for five years. Empire's contract duration was not specified, but Jordan Vidor, regional vice president of provider solutions, said its health system contract renewals tend to be for three years. UnitedHealthcare serves over 3.7 million New Yorkers, and Empire reaches over 4 million in the state.

UnitedHealthcare expanded its value-based payment model with Northwell for its members on employer-sponsored, individual and Medicare Advantage plans, rewarding the health system for achieving key quality measures on outcomes and cost. For Empire, it has heightened value-based payment arrangements with Mount Sinai on its commercial plan side, incentivizing the health system to maintain and exceed market-level targets for outcomes and costs through risk and reward sharing.

"Although this is not the first time we've had a value-based payment model with Mount Sinai, this new contract is the most impactful with regards to risk/reward sharing," said Vidor.

The expanded value-based model supports a shared goal of providing New Yorkers quality health care while simplifying patient experience, said Michael McGuire, CEO of UnitedHealthcare of New York.

The pandemic has changed the paradigm of health care delivery, and as the contract came up for renewal, both sides realized the new terms would need to capture that shift, Vidor said.

"For example, telehealth has become a significant element to our industry," he noted. "Covid exacerbated the need for a robust telehealth program for providers and payers."

To that effect, Empire and Mount Sinai rolled out the Mount Sinai Emergency Triage, Treat and Transport and Mount Sinai Community Paramedicine programs. The former stipulates that when Empire members call 911 and Mount Sinai is dispatched, the responder can treat the patient at the home instead of bringing the patient to the emergency room if it is medically appropriate. The latter program is for Empire members who call Mount Sinai directly to have a paramedic dispatched to the patient's home for care, avoiding an ER visit.

"It helps avoid costly and unnecessary visits," Vidor said.

Empire also became a participating payer in the Mount Sinai Visiting Doctors Program for its Medicare members. The health system provides primary and palliative care to elderly and homebound patients with chronic illness.

UnitedHealthcare and Empire both expanded care-coordination efforts with their respective providers, such as through enhanced data sharing. At Empire, the renewed contract stipulated a goal to achieve real-time bidirectional exchange of admission, discharge and transfer notifications for 80% of its members by the end of 2022. "Real-time exchange of information is important because it allows us to jointly manage a patient's case and experience of care," Vidor said. "Oftentimes because of laggard processes and time to process such data, patient care is not the best it could be."

Northwell Health, based in New Hyde Park, is a network of 23 hospitals, 830 outpatient facilities and over 16,600 physicians. It has about 76,000 employees.

Mount Sinai, headquartered on the Upper East Side, consists of eight hospitals, 13 joint venture centers, 410 ambulatory facilities and over 7,300 physicians.