



Premera Blue Cross Expands Access to Affordable Behavioral Health Care as Seasonal Stress, Demand Rise

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Mountlake Terrace, Wash. – As families head back to school and work routines, many are feeling the strain of busier schedules and shorter days. Demand for behavioral health support typically rises this time of year, and Premera Blue Cross is expanding access to care through new digital options, a larger provider network and supporting community partnerships that make behavioral health services easier to find and more affordable.

“This time of year, can be especially tough for families and young people,” said Dr. Romilla Batra, Senior Vice President and Chief Medical Officer for Premera Blue Cross. “We want our members to know that when they’re ready to ask for help, care is available. That means making it easier to connect with the right behavioral health providers, offering support through multiple channels, and bringing mental health care into primary care settings. We’re also focused on integrating behavioral and physical health and making sure people with the greatest needs get the comprehensive support they deserve.”

Rising Demand for Behavioral Health Support

According to the [National Alliance on Mental Health \(NAMI\)](#), one in five adults experience a mental, emotional, or behavioral disorder. NAMI also reports that about 17 percent of youth between the ages of six to 17 years old experience a mental health disorder.

Seasonal changes amplify these challenges. [A poll from the American Psychiatric Association](#) found 41 percent of Americans say their mood worsens in winter, with 27 percent reporting symptoms of depression. These trends point to predictable increases in demand for behavioral health support during the colder months, highlighting the need for accessible and timely care.

Meeting Members Where They Are

Premera is responding with expanded digital and in-person options that make behavioral health care easier to find and access:

- **Provider Network Growth:** Premera has increased its behavioral health provider network in Washington by 48 percent over the last five years, adding almost 4,000 new clinicians across specialties and geographies. In Alaska, Premera has increased its behavioral health network by 71 percent since 2020.
- **Digital Access:** Premera members have flexible access to therapy, psychiatry, and medication management through trusted partners such as Spring Health, Rula, Headway, and Talkspace. They offer care via video, phone, and, in Talkspace’s case, text-based therapy. While capabilities and coverage vary by partner and region, some of the

features available through these partnerships include nationwide access, online scheduling and matching to providers based on member needs, and guaranteed appointment times within two to three days. These organizations are part of Premera's broader behavioral health network, which includes a wide range of providers offering virtual and in-person care. The depth and breadth of this network ensures members have access to high-quality, flexible care options that meet their individual needs. In January 2026, the new Premera Health Hub will connect members to more than 25 wellness and condition management solutions, offering personalized guidance based on individual needs. Members can explore these options, and more, through Premera's [Find Care](#) website and the Premera app.

- **Providing personalized, one-on-one member support:** The Personal Health Support program at Premera offers members access to a team of personal health support clinicians (PHSCs), which includes licensed mental health professionals. These clinicians leverage Premera's market-leading, integrated case management model to meet members where they are. This work includes:
 - Assessing a member's whole health, looking at both physical and mental health conditions and barriers to health improvement.
 - Assisting with timely access to quality mental health care that meets a member's unique needs.
 - Ensuring access to a primary care provider to address both physical and mental health conditions.
 - Connecting members with community resources to help with financial, transportation, social, or cultural needs.
 - PHSCs also track progress to ensure a member's mental health is improving.
- **Partnering with Kinwell clinics:** Kinwell Medical Group operates 16 clinics across Washington, plus a statewide virtual care clinic, for Premera Blue Cross members. Kinwell's integrated approach to care means patients can address mental health concerns with their primary care provider, lowering barriers to diagnosis and care. These clinicians can help children, teens, and adults, and are supported by Kinwell's behavioral health specialists.
- **Connecting members through Matchmaker™ for Behavioral Health:** Premera members who use this program receive a curated list from the Matchmaker team of in-network behavioral and mental health clinicians. The list is tailored to the member's specific needs and only includes providers who are accepting new patients. The Matchmaker team can source providers for adults and youth anywhere in the country. Lists are provided to members at no cost if they have access to the program through their plan. In 2024, Matchmaker™ supported 2,700 members nationwide, up from 800 in 2023.
- **Integrating care into the community:** Through Premera's investment in the AIMS Center at the University of Washington School of Medicine, three clinics serving a higher population of Black and African American patients received funds to implement the Collaborative Care model. This care model, developed by UW, helps patients receive care for their mental health in the same setting they are treated for their physical health. Clinics included HopeCentral pediatrics clinic in south Seattle, and Northwest Medical Specialties in Tacoma and Federal Way. This work builds on a common goal of Premera and UW Medicine to improve mental health outcomes in the Pacific Northwest. In 2019, Premera invested \$10 million in the UW School of Medicine to support the integration of Collaborative Care in clinics across Washington and Alaska. To date, 23 primary care

clinics in rural parts of both states have received funding to implement Collaborative Care with support from the AIMS Center.

A Timely Commitment

Behavioral health challenges touch every generation from teenagers navigating the pressures of a new school year, to parents balancing work and caregiving, to adults experiencing seasonal mood changes. By combining digital innovation, network expansion, and targeted community partnerships, Premera is addressing urgent gaps in behavioral health care.

“The need for behavioral health support is growing, and we’re rising to meet it,” Dr. Batra said. “Whether it’s a teenager battling anxiety, a parent overwhelmed by daily stress, or an older adult seeking coordinated care, Premera is making it easier to access affordable, high-quality help. Because when it comes to mental health, no one should have to navigate the journey alone, and we won’t let them.”

For more information about Premera’s approach to mental and behavioral health care, visit [our Mental Health page](#).

About Premera Blue Cross

Premera Blue Cross, a not-for-profit, independent licensee of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association based in Mountlake Terrace, Wash., is a leading health plan in the Pacific Northwest, providing comprehensive health benefits and tailored services to more than 2.5 million people, from individuals to Fortune 100 companies. For more information, visit www.premera.com.

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