

End-of-year mental health reflection



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It is hard to believe that we are closing out on the last month of the year, which means that this is my final *Postal Record* article for 2020. I believe most people are ready for 2020 to be a distant memory, but unfortunately, regardless of time passing, we will carry the effects of this year well into the future.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), during June of 2020, U.S. adults reported considerably elevated mental health conditions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Younger adults, racial/ethnic minorities, essential workers and unpaid adult caregivers reported having experienced disproportionately worse mental health outcomes, increased substance use and elevated suicidal ideation.

Mental and physical health are equally important components of overall health. Moreover, mental illness, especially depression, increases the risk for many types of physical health problems, particularly long-lasting conditions such as stroke, Type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

First, let's consider: What is mental health? Mental health consists of a person's emotional, psychological and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others and make choices.

Everyone goes through changes in their emotions, thoughts and behavior from time to time. But when these changes make you less able to function on a day-to-day basis, then it is time to talk to a doctor or mental health professional. Symptoms can vary depending on each individual's situation, but some signify that it is time to seek help. These include: feelings of depression, anxiety, excessive anger; sadness or crankiness that last longer than normal; withdrawing from friends and family; loss of interest in things you normally enjoy; thoughts of self-harm; and increased substance abuse. These can all be warning signs of mental illness.

If you have any concerns about your mental health, or experience any of these symptoms, there is help available—you are not alone. With appropriate support, you can identify mental health conditions and receive appropriate treatment. Please, do not wait.

High Option members

If you are a member of the NALC High Option Plan, please reach out to OptumHealthSM Behavioral Solutions by calling 877-468-1016, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This toll-free number gets you right to OptumHealth Behavioral Solutions dedicated customer service department, which is staffed with

professionals who can give you immediate and confidential assistance. OptumHealth Behavioral Solutions is a nationally recognized leader specializing in providing behavioral health care and substance abuse services. It consists of more than 6,500 facilities nationwide and more than 225,000 in-network clinicians.

You also can schedule tele-mental health/virtual visits for added convenience. To locate an in-network tele-mental health provider, call Optum at 877-468-1016. You also can visit liveandworkwell.com to locate a tele-mental health provider and find other member resources. The portal provides access to self-management tools, prevention programs, educational materials, videos and more to help members manage chronic diseases, find ways to alleviate stress, and take charge of their overall health and well-being.

CDHP/Value Option members

No matter which plan you are enrolled in, there is help. We understand that mental and emotional well-being is essential to overall health. Cigna Behavioral Health network for the NALC Health Benefit Plan CDHP and Value Option Plan has more than 327,000 in-network clinicians, 6,000 in-network facilities and 20,000 in-network clinics.

The website mycigna.com provides convenient, confidential and open access to information you need, when you need it. An online search tool also is available to help you find an in-network clinician. If you call 855-511-1893, a specialist can help you identify the nature of your problem and match you with an in-network provider who has the appropriate experience to help with your specific needs.

Taking advantage of these services can help you deal with the stressful and challenging situations of everyday life and assist you in managing a wide range of mental health and substance use disorder conditions, including:

- Physical/emotional abuse
- Depression and/or anxiety
- Alcohol and drug addiction
- Eating disorders
- Alzheimer's disease and dementia
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Schizophrenia
- Bipolar disorder
- Stress

As one of my favorite childhood characters, Winnie the Pooh, said, "I always get to where I'm going by walking away from where I have been."

Let's walk away from 2020 together, look toward the future, seek help when we need it, support and help others, realize that it's OK to not be OK, and commit to improving our physical and mental health, no matter where we have been.

On behalf of the NALC Health Benefit Plan, I want to wish you and your families a great holiday season and happy New Year.