



**BlueCross  
BlueShield**

**National  
LABOR OFFICE**

# LABORMatters

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## South Carolina BlueCross Foundation Invests in WISE Schools with New Grant Opportunity

It is well established that healthier children tend to have better grades, are more attentive in class and have fewer absences. To better support South Carolina schools in creating healthier school environments, the BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation is announcing its Wellness Inspired School Environment (WISE) grants, which are open to all public and private nonprofit schools in South Carolina serving grades K-12. One application from each school will be considered.

The Foundation is partnering with the Alliance for a Healthier Generation (AHG) and its Healthy Schools Program framework, which has been endorsed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). This framework develops and monitors progress toward a wellness action plan. Applicants can use the funds to implement activities from these wellness action plans.

Schools can apply for grants ranging from \$2,000 – 8,000 to support items based on the six evidence-based AHG modules:

- School Health and Safety Policies and Environment
- Health Education
- Physical Education and Other Physical Activity Programs
- Nutrition Services
- Health Promotion for Staff
- Family and Community Involvement

According to Foundation's executive director Erika Kirby, "Schools often want to do more to improve student well-being, but may not have the resources to do so. We want to make the healthy choice the easy choice, so we are supporting healthy school environments, which encourage and promote physical activity and healthy eating. This supports our long-term goal of improving the health and well-being of South Carolina's children."

Schools are a natural channel to encourage and foster this behavior because children spend more time at school than any other place outside of the home.

"The health and nutrition of South Carolina's students has a strong impact on their success in the classroom and throughout their lives," said Molly Spearman, state superintendent of education. "I applaud the BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina Foundation for recognizing this correlation and bringing additional wellness opportunities to schools in our state. I look forward to working with the Foundation and other community partners to ensure that every South Carolina student is healthy and ready to learn."

Applications are now being accepted and schools can learn more by visiting: [www.bcbsscfoundation.org/wisegrants.aspx](http://www.bcbsscfoundation.org/wisegrants.aspx)

Schools can also email questions to: [info.foundation@bcbssc.com](mailto:info.foundation@bcbssc.com)



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HEALTH COVERAGE  
FOR AMERICA'S  
WORKING FAMILIES**

# Executive Director's Corner

A MESSAGE FROM THE NATIONAL LABOR OFFICE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, **BONNIE SUMMERS**

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**“A small group of thoughtful people could change the world. Indeed it’s the only thing that ever has.”** – *Margaret Mead*

This month, the NLO hosted its annual Healthcare Strategies meeting. Mark Compton from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas City submitted the meeting theme: World-class Solutions, Hometown Relationships. We were pleased to welcome labor and healthcare leaders from across the United States and Europe to our annual meeting.

During the meeting, we also awarded our 2017 Labor Representative of the Year Award to Mike Nowak of Excellus BlueCross BlueShield. Congrats Mike and all the nominees! Our incredible BCBS teams and the individuals that bring their many talents to the table are the reason BCBS Plans offer unsurpassed health coverage to labor today. Echoing Margaret Mead’s sentiment, our BCBS teams ultimately transform how our labor customers receive BCBS health coverage and serve as a catalyst for offering innovative solutions based on local community needs.

The NLO is pleased to announce our **Labor Matters** newsletter has gone digital. We’re making it easier than ever to get the latest labor news! To subscribe to our newsletter online, visit <http://eepurl.com/dah3ZT>. If you have any questions about our online edition, contact [nlo@bcbsa.com](mailto:nlo@bcbsa.com).

For additional information regarding BCBS Plan programs, please contact your local Plan directly. If you have any questions about the NLO or this newsletter, contact us at 202.626.4815.

In unity,

Bonnie Summers, PAHM, CMCE, CHC  
Executive Director  
BCBSA National Labor Office

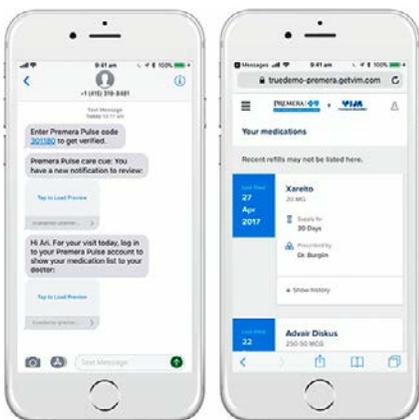


## Innovative and Personalized Engagement Platform Helps Alaska Customers Manage Care



Premera Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alaska (Premera) recently announced the launch of a new engagement platform designed to simplify health care for customers in Alaska, making it easier for patients to find the doctors and medications they need.

Called Premera Pulse, the new service addresses the challenge patients face when searching for the right, high-value provider, accessing their medication list and medical history, or scheduling doctor appointments. The personalized text messaging experience notifies the customer at important moments in their health care journey, and directs them to the information they need via a secure website, at the time they need it.



Eligible customers were offered the choice to opt in to this offering as part of a pilot phase launched last year. They provided their member ID and phone number, and with a one-time

activation, started receiving the text messages.

“What makes this product unique is that the text messages customers receive are based on the customer’s specific health plan and history,” said Jim Grazko, President of Premera Blue Cross Blue Shield of Alaska. “You only receive the information that is relevant and timely for you, making your healthcare journey more seamless and frictionless.”

For example, a customer might receive a text message if they check in to a doctor’s office, receive a referral to a specialist, or have not used their preventive benefits yet. The offering also does not require an app download, making the information more easily accessible at the time the customer needs it.

With this platform, eligible Premera customers can:

- Find in-network care
- Schedule appointments
- Access medication lists
- Get reminders about important preventive care visits
- Set up convenient appointment reminders
- Rate doctors after visits

As of Feb. 26, 2018, Premera Pulse is making the healthcare experience

more seamless for over 9,260 activated members. The platform also makes booking appointments with high-value care providers easier for the patients. Through the platform’s provider scheduling feature, patients have booked more than 390 appointments.

Designed in partnership with Vim (formerly BookMD), a healthcare tech company based in San Francisco, Premera Pulse is available to Alaska individual customers as well as customers who pay for their health insurance through their employer. The partnership was initiated by Premera’s innovation team called the Premera Test Kitchen. On behalf of Premera Blue Cross, Vim is an independent company which provides the platform behind Premera Pulse. ■

**GO GREEN!**

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To subscribe to Labor Matters online, visit <http://eepurl.com/dah3ZT>

## NEW DIRECTIONS BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

# OPIOID CRISIS: Why Companies Should Take Note

Written by Dr. Deborah Happ  
Senior Vice President, New Directions  
Behavioral Health, Kansas City



Like abuse of alcohol or illicit drugs, the nation's growing opioid epidemic is presenting workplace challenges. The current opioid epidemic has been called the worst drug crisis in American

history, reaching every corner of society, including workplaces both large and small. This epidemic involves the use of prescription opioid (pain) medications and illicit drugs, including heroin and illegally manufactured fentanyl.

A survey recently released by the National Safety Council reveals that more than 70 percent of workplaces are feeling the negative effects of opioid abuse. Nearly 40 percent of employers said employees are missing work due to abuse of painkillers, with roughly the same percent reporting employee abuse of the drugs on the job.

Despite the prevalence of substance use and addiction in businesses across the country, only a small percentage of those with opioid or other substance use disorders ask for help or receive it. And that's costing employers around \$10 billion annually from absenteeism, according to the American Society of Addiction Medicine.



## HERE'S FOUR WAYS YOU CAN ADDRESS OPIOID DEPENDENCE AND SUBSTANCE ADDICTION IN YOUR WORKPLACE:

### 1. Create a non-stigmatizing workplace

One way to influence more people to seek help is to convince them that getting treatment is the smartest thing to do. By talking about addiction like any other disease, you silence the stigma and allow people to realize it's all right to ask for help. It's equally critical that owners and managers send the message that your workplace is a safe place, and that you're here to help.

### 2. Equip staff to recognize the signs of addiction

It's important that management and staff be trained on the early signs of opioid and substance addiction — irritability, poor concentration and declining performance — so they can intervene before the situation deteriorates. Train managers to address performance issues, because that often opens up the dialog to talk about sensitive matters. By showing genuine concern, you gain the trust of your employees, which allows you to guide them to the care they need.

### 3. Offer support to employees and family members

Just as you would with an employee who has a medical condition, such as cancer or heart disease, offer non-judgmental support to employees with a substance use disorder. Remember, employees who have family members struggling with substance addiction suffer at work too. Those who are affected by a loved one's addiction can have increased

absenteeism, lack of focus and health problems related to stress. If you don't already have one, consider providing an employee assistance program for your employees. EAP services can be an effective first step for employees and their dependents to initiate support for nonmedical prescription drug problems, and can offer counseling and referral services; conduct substance abuse evaluations or connect an employee to a qualified substance abuse professional. The best thing about an EAP is that it costs the employee nothing and is completely confidential.

### 4. Help employees access treatment

Ensure that your employees have access to quality treatment for substance addiction. Consult with your health plan provider about a comprehensive plan that covers inpatient and outpatient services. Employees with opioid addiction can often benefit from medication-assisted treatment (MAT), which reduces the cravings for opioids and allows employees to work while in treatment. Finally, it's important to remember that employees struggling with opioid misuse or substance addiction are not weak or morally corrupt. Drug addiction is a disease and needs to be treated and talked about like any other disease — with compassion and quality care. Opioid misuse impacts much more than workplace performance: Overdoses killed more than 64,000 Americans in 2016, up 21 percent over 2015, according to federal officials. ■

## NASCO's FlexLink® & BCBS Plans



NASCO has been supporting jointly administered labor accounts with its FlexLink® product for more than ten years, and has had great success in growing both product capabilities and utilization over that time. NASCO currently has five Blue Cross and Blue Shield (BCBS) Plans taking advantage of FlexLink, with over one million members. The company is also connected to numerous TPAs and IT partners, and is a strategic alliance with the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association (BCBSA) National Labor Office.

NASCO's FlexLink product provides a collaborative claims processing arrangement between the NASCO BCBS Plan and the labor fund or its third-party administrator. Recently, BCBS Plans have expressed an increased interest in using a self-administered option for claims processing for their current jointly administered accounts.

This interest has opened the door for NASCO to offer other products and capabilities to both BCBS Plans and the funds and provide them with ultimate flexibility and customization in implementing their labor solutions.

NASCO recently had an opportunity to speak with a BCBS Plan regarding their use of what has been referred to as a

joint administration model. In this plan's joint administration model, the fund not only receives the benefits of NASCO's FlexLink product, but it also gains direct access to the NASCO claims system.

"The [joint administration] model preserves fund office FTEs, offers a degree of personalization and eliminates cost burdens around training and IT enhancements. It is particularly beneficial for those funds that are looking to self-administer benefits or those that may be grappling with older systems and technology," the BCBS Plan said.

In addition to a 10,000-member beta account previously implemented using the joint administration model, the BCBS Plan and NASCO recently implemented the same model for a large labor client of the plan—effective Jan. 1, 2018.

This particular labor client represents a large, diverse fund with more than 50,000 members. The joint administration model was of interest because the fund was in need of a claims system that had national account-type capabilities as well as the ability to grow and handle their growth over time. NASCO provided a platform that could sustain the fund as they moved forward.

"In the [joint administration] model, the

fund receives direct access to the claims system, and [the BCBS Plan] provides all of the training and support," said the BCBS Plan. "The fund also is integrated directly into the [plan's] provider network, which is extremely important."

With this solution, the benefit is not having to lease another system. The fund is kept current with mandates and enhancements and it has access to training and support for the NASCO claims system. In addition, it gains the assurance that its own member experience is as seamless as possible.

The BCBS Plans benefit from knowing that technical and performance standards are being met through the fund having direct access to one of their systems.

"We will continue to promote and target this [joint administration] model for our larger self-administered funds," said the BCBS Plan. "We have found the experience to be a very positive one in terms of client retention and developing a deeper relationship with the funds."

**For further information regarding NASCO's labor solutions, please contact Bob Meier, Director of Marketing and Communications for NASCO, at [Bob.meier@nasco.com](mailto:Bob.meier@nasco.com) or 678.441.6104.**



### ABOUT NASCO

Owned by and exclusively serving Blue Cross and Blue Shield Plans across the nation for more than 30 years, NASCO cultivates a community that fosters the collaboration needed to promote innovation, deliver shared solutions and create a competitive cost advantage.

# Regence Reduces Opioid Prescriptions by 22% through Point-of-Sale Alerts, Direct Provider Outreach and Strengthened Policies

Regence health plans announced progress toward a company goal to reduce opioids prescriptions by 25 percent across the four-state region of Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Utah by 2020. Results reported through the fourth quarter of 2017 reflect a 22 percent decrease since 2015. Regence is on pace to reach a 25 percent reduction in opioid prescriptions two years ahead of schedule with expanded policies and practices that took effect Jan. 1, 2018.

The initiative is part of broader work by Regence to build a comprehensive opioid management program to decrease opioid misuse while supporting appropriate use for people who can benefit from treatment.

“The opioid epidemic is a public health crisis that affects millions of Americans,” said Dr. Richard Popiel, executive vice president and chief medical officer at Regence. “We’re taking a stand to support our communities and the members we serve. We are ensuring members who can benefit from opioid treatment get the care they need, while strengthening our medication policies to reduce opioid misuse, and supporting our members who need addiction treatment.”

## Regence’s four-state market has seen a significant impact from the opioid epidemic:

- Oregon has one of the nation’s highest rates of opioid misuse and more drug poisoning deaths involving prescription opioids than any other drug. On average, three Oregonians die every week from prescription opioid overdose, according to the Oregon Health Authority.
- In Idaho, more than 200 people die each year from prescription drug overdose, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.
- Utah has the seventh-highest overdose rate in the United States, according to the Utah Department of Health.
- The majority of all drug overdose deaths in Washington – more than six out of 10 – involve opioids, the Washington State Department of Health reports.



## Regence initiatives to combat opioid misuse include:

- Pharmacy point-of-sale messaging that alerts pharmacists of potential for inappropriate use or misuse
- Claims data analysis shared with doctors that reveals opportunities for more informed clinical decisions that result in better outcomes
- Partnership with provider groups to share opioid use data and encourage responsible prescribing practices
- Strong medication policies aligned with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations and regional guidelines
- Expanded online provider opioid and pain management toolkit
- Partnerships with public officials and community organizations to create awareness about opioid use and develop community-based solutions
- Proposed legislative action to combat prescription drug abuse, nationally and in the Pacific Northwest and Intermountain regions
- Promotion of educational and awareness campaigns focusing on the opioid epidemic, such as the PBS opioid documentary, “Understanding the Opioid Epidemic,” which began airing Jan. 17 nationwide

Regence continues to evaluate its programs and initiatives to support the access to high-quality, high-value treatment for our members. ■





# OVERCOMING Dry, Dehydrated Skin

By Dr. Debra Reilly

**Dry, dehydrated skin can be a temporary condition or a long-term, daily challenge.** It can be inherited, or the result of continual exposure to environmental stressors such as sun, wind, changing temperatures and chemicals, in both the products we use and our environment. As a physician, I battle dry skin due to frequent hand washing and sanitizing and know first-hand the many contributing factors for dry skin. Treating dry skin typically involves making both product and lifestyle changes, but before doing so it's important to understand the main causes of this condition.

**1. Intrinsic Aging:** Intrinsic aging is the normal process of aging, which begins at birth and varies from person to person due to genetics. It involves decreases in dermal collagen, which leads to moisture loss, and decreases in sebaceous gland production, affecting the skin's barrier function. A strong skin barrier is essential for maintaining the health of your skin. The good news, is that only 10-15% of skin conditions are due to genetics. The true solution lies in controllable factors.

**2. Lifestyle:** Alcohol, stress and certain foods all cause dehydration of the body, which in turn, dehydrate the skin. Dehydration can also cause insomnia, creating a vicious cycle of stress, dehydration and sleep deprivation. Stress management techniques like meditation and yoga, have been found to lower peoples' stress response and improve sleep as well. Hydration, both internal and external, is fundamental to the healthy function of our bodies. Drinking eight glasses of water per day and reducing the consumption of alcohol and sodium, will help you look and feel better in a matter of days.

**3. Environmental Elements:** Sun, wind, cold temperatures and indoor forced air all contribute to dry, dehydrated and premature aging of our skin. The effects of these elements can be short term, in the form of temporary dry skin or sunburn, or long-term in the form of pigment spots, fine lines and wrinkles and increased skin sensitivity.

Moisture is critical for the maintenance of healthy skin. As a physician, I look for products that not only moisturize, but aid in my skin's repair process and provide a barrier against environmental elements. I trust BREVENA<sup>®</sup> Laboratory's medical grade skin care products, with Macro B Complex<sup>®</sup>. This ground-breaking ingredient has transformed my skin, and that of my patients. I frequently recommend BREVENA's Restorative Skin Balm to my patients dealing with chronic dry skin, and Eczema. I have also noticed dramatic improvement using BREVENA's Daily Hydration Moisturizer and Restore & Hydrate Overnight Cream to replenish the moisture in my face and improve the signs of aging.

**For more information, visit [www.brevena.com](http://www.brevena.com)** ■

**Dr. Debra Reilly is affiliated with BREVENA. Dr. Reilly has supported BREVENA since its inception, using BREVENA technology as a plastic surgeon.**



## NATIONAL LABOR OFFICE EDUCATIONAL WEBINAR SERIES

### Who should register?

- BCBS Plan Employees
- Organized Labor Leaders, Healthcare Bargainers and Fund Managers
- Benefit Consultants
- Human Resource Administrators

**To register for a webinar, contact [nlo@bcbsa.com](mailto:nlo@bcbsa.com) or 202.626.4815.**

### SCHEDULE

Month	Date	Strategic Alliance
March	29	Vitals
April	26	BREVENA
May	17	Teladoc/ Best Doctors
June	21	TBA
July	19	TBA
September	20	Teladoc/ Best Doctors
October	18	TBA
November	8	Davis Vision
December	6	HearUSA

2018 NLO CALENDAR OF EVENTS					
Apr.	14	IBEW Construction & Maintenance Conference (Washington, DC)	June	11 – 14	Rutgers – BCBS Labor Studies Program (New Brunswick, NJ)
	15 – 18	AFL-CIO Building Construction Trades Department (Washington, DC)		14 – 17	LERA 70th Annual Meeting (Baltimore, MD)
	16 – 18	NLO Spring Board of Directors Meeting (Washington, DC)	Sep.	10 – 12	NLO Fall Board of Directors Meeting (St. Paul, MN)
	Apr 29 – May 2	State and Local Government Benefits Association National Conference (Jacksonville, FL)		24 – 26	NCCMP Annual Conference (Hollywood, FL)
May	15 – 17	Self-Insured Workers' Compensation Executive Forum (Charleston, SC)	Oct.	14 – 17	IFEBP Annual Conference (New Orleans, LA)
	13 – 16	NCPERS Annual Conference & Exhibition (New York, NY)		21 – 24	NCPERS Public Safety Employees' Pension & Benefits Conference
			Dec.	10 – 12	Food & Drug Conference (Las Vegas, NV)

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Blue Cross Blue Shield Association is an association of independent Blue Cross and Blue Shield companies.

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