



## **25th Annual “Best of the Best” Showcased Innovation in Enhancing Mental Health Care During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Engaging Employees in a Virtual World**

The Florida Alliance for Healthcare Value held its 25th annual “Best of the Best” event virtually on December 1, 2020. Sponsored by AdventHealth, eHome Counseling Group, Orlando Health and Welldoc, Inc., this year’s event highlighted effective programs initiated by both self-funded and fully insured employers and featured sessions on “Mental Health ... The Second Wave of the Pandemic” and “Engagement in a Virtual World” along with “Driving for Value in Health Care: A Market Assessment of Tampa and Orlando,” a sneak peek at a preliminary report of a study in progress by the Florida Alliance and Catalyst for Payment Reform, an independent, nonprofit corporation.

### **Mental Health ... The Second Wave of the Pandemic**

The first session included presentations by Dr. Charles Lattarulo, Director of Behavioral Health at American Express, and Darcy Gruttadaro, JD, Director of the Center for Workplace Mental Health/American Psychiatric Association Foundation. Dr. Lattarulo kicked off this session by sharing an overview of the Healthy Minds program at American Express, which was established in 2012 and because of COVID-19, became virtual in 2020. He outlined six key principles that guide this employee mental health care program:

- **Data-driven Decision Making** — led to creation of a dashboard to track Employee Assistance Program (EAP) engagement, as well as other de-identified aggregate mental health data.
- **Meet Colleagues Where They Are** — resulted in development of “micro-learning” (small learning units and short-term activities), webinars and trainings, live interviews, and blogs
- **Easy Access to Care When Needed** — involves ensuring that the right providers and support products are available at the right time
- **Build Community** — generated development of open agenda “drop-in” groups for employees
- **Back Colleagues Through Transition** — provides support for employees experiencing grief and loss as well as those who exit the company, relocate, or return to work after a leave of absence
- **Align Internal with External Incentives** — ensures employees have access to the same apps and incentives as card members

“Mental health care is holistic,” explained Dr. Lattarulo. “As an employer, you need to pay attention to your own culture and find what works for your employees. For us, that encompasses everything from mindfulness techniques, deskercise, meditation and yoga



to karaoke. We also know that employees need help in the moment to manage mental health which is why we created the micro-learning sessions.”

American Express also developed a comprehensive mental health awareness training program to help team members recognize signs of emotional stress and learn how to have conversations about mental health.

“It began as a leadership training but was soon expanded to accommodate all employees,” shared Dr. Lattarulo. “We learned people have a strong appetite for this information. In fact, it is currently the number one voluntary employee training offered at American Express.”

Ms. Gruttadaro followed by sharing the efforts of the Center for Workplace Mental Health.

“These are extremely challenging times for mental health,” she explained. “The COVID-19 pandemic, racial and political challenges, and economic uncertainty have created a trifecta.”

According to a recent pulse survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Census Bureau, 41 percent of Americans are experiencing symptoms of anxiety or depression, and in the 18-29 age group, this figure increases to almost 60 percent.

Ms. Gruttadaro shared the following recommendations to help employers navigate the current crisis:

**Consider the LEAD Framework — representing Leadership, Effective Communication, Adapting to Change, and Doubling Down on Access.**

1. **Strengthen prevention efforts** — Share signs of common mental health conditions, promote early and easy access to care, educate about stress management strategies and mindfulness tools, and consider development of employee resource groups.
2. **Double down on access to care** — Examine your EAP offerings and data. Consider digital options. Ensure your health plan benefits are connecting employees with the care they need.

“We need to communicate to employees that mental health matters,” said Ms. Gruttadaro. “One silver lining of the pandemic is that the stigma is slowly eroding, but we still need more awareness and better access.”



The LEAD Framework is outlined in the Center's [Employer Guide](#) on COVID-19 and Mental Health.

She outlined the Center for Workplace Mental Health's "Notice. Talk. Act. at Work" program, a 50-minute, e-learning training module for leaders and managers. It focuses on three key tenets:

1. **Notice** changes that are not typical.
2. **Talk** by checking in.
3. **Act** by connecting the person with services and supports.

You can learn more about the program at [WorkplaceMentalHealth.org/NTAatWork](https://workplacementalhealth.org/NTAatWork).

Ms. Gruttadaro also provided information about The Path Forward for Mental Health and Substance Use, a national initiative led by her organization along with the National Alliance of Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions, the American Psychiatric Association (APA), HR Policy Association, the Bowman Family Foundation and Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute. The Florida Alliance for Healthcare Value has been selected to lead Florida efforts, and you can learn more at <https://flhealthvalue.org/our-work/mental-health-and-substance-use/>.

Dr. Karen van Caulil, President and CEO of the Florida Alliance, shared that Florida's Project Opioid effort has released a report that will be shared with all attendees that underscores how serious the impact of COVID-19 has been on the mental health of Floridians. Based on the data from the Florida Department of Health, all drug overdose deaths are up 43% from 2019, 55% from 2018, and overdose deaths are projected to be 60% higher by the end of 2020. Floridians surveyed have reported issues with accessing needed care, increases in anxiety, depression, and fear since the start of the pandemic and increased use of substances to reduce physical and emotional pain.

### **Engagement in a Virtual World**

The second educational session of the morning focused on increasing employee engagement in the virtual world and included presentations by Michelle Martin, MBA, VP of Total Rewards Experience at ViacomCBS, and Laurel Pickering, MPH, Executive VP of Enterprise Solutions, and Carey Hutchins, MHRD, VP of Client Success, at Welldoc, Inc.

Martin began and shared that when the pandemic hit, ViacomCBS was fortunate to already have several digital and telehealth solutions in place, including virtual doctor visits, virtual behavioral health, the Ginger emotional health program and the BlueStar diabetes management program. In addition, as their workforce became 90% remote,



vendors stepped up to provide additional solutions. Some of the specific communication tools ViacomCBS has employed to increase engagement include home mailers, webinars, virtual events, emails, portals, apps and Slack.

“I believe one of the keys to our success is our focus on fun,” explained Martin. “From costume, mask and photo contests to employee music performances and creative wellness challenges, we develop strategies to engage our employees and their families in our virtual events.”

Pickering followed by sharing that 2020 was the largest funding year ever for digital health and explained that virtual health is especially important for managing chronic diseases because it provides convenience and easier access.

“Our BlueStar digital tool for diabetes saw a 21% increase in engagement during COVID-19,” said Pickering.

Hutchins then shared three communication approaches that employers can use to enhance engagement:

1. **Multi-cycle campaigns** — maintain ongoing communication throughout the year and share smaller bits of information more often
2. **Multi-channel campaigns** — employ a mix of communication tools, including email, text, print/direct mail and digital
3. **Targeting individuals with relevant messages based on data-driven insights** — personalize communication with the right message at the right time based on usage

“Employers need to think like a salesperson or marketer,” she explained. “Too often they fear over-communicating. Remember that employees are consumers of these health programs, and it takes an average of seven interactions before they will engage.”

Hutchins also recommended that employers enlist the help of their vendors in providing data on specific trends amongst their employee population as well as best practices and effective messaging.

### **Driving for Value in Health Care: A Market Assessment of Tampa and Orlando**

The 2020 “Best of the Best” event concluded with a presentation by Andrea Caballero, MPA, Program Director of Catalyst for Payment Reform, and Dr. Karen van Caulil, President and CEO of the Florida Alliance for Healthcare Value. They shared highlights of a preliminary report on opportunities and obstacles for driving healthcare value in the Tampa and Orlando markets. Part of this project encompasses collection of qualitative data through surveys and interviews of a variety of healthcare stakeholders, including employer/healthcare purchasers, providers, hospitals/health systems and health plans. Highlights of the initial combined findings for both markets included the following:



- Purchasers believe health plans have market power due to anti-competitive practices. They also believe that hospitals are dominant and leverage their significant market power.
- Providers see health plans as a barrier to reform and believe they display the least amount of innovation. They also think telehealth is essential to any payment reform model.
- Health plans think providers have market power and leverage it against health plans.
- Health plans believe that fee-for-service still reigns and don't see payment reform initiatives likely to change as a result of COVID-19 (counter to national trends that indicate it has accelerated reform)
- Purchasers have some bundled payment programs in place and have further interest in bundles but believe they are operationally challenging and require coordination.
- Providers believe bundled payments are growing rapidly and see the strategic value but face scaling and operational issues. They see upside risk (bonuses) as a winning strategy more than downside risk models.
- Health plans also believe bundled payment models are promising but operationally challenging.
- Purchasers think consolidation might create health systems more willing to take on risk.

The event concluded with a discussion about the need to push healthcare purchasers to use their collective power to act and engage health plans and providers in the uncomfortable conversations that are needed to further drive value-based care.