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mhca Trends Report: Summary of Survey Key Findings

A Guest Article from NextGen Healthcare

NextGen Healthcare recently partnered with **mhca** to survey member organizations on industry trends. A full trends report will be published within the next few weeks. In the interim, this article highlights the key findings of the survey.

1. **The industry issue or trend mhca members are paying the most attention to this year is the *shift of reimbursement models from fee-for-service (FFS) to value-based care (VBC).***

Many behavioral health and integrated care organizations are well positioned to transition to value-based payment arrangements, especially those that provide a full spectrum of care in one physical setting. Yet challenges remain. For example, if outpatient clients go to other organizations for care, the initial provider loses both control of and insight into critical elements of care. Losing control of or insight into care services is the Achilles heel of value-based contracts because it impacts the provider group's ability to manage risk regarding quality measures, clinical outcomes, and care costs. Lacking insight and influence on any care services provided elsewhere presents a challenge to VBC reimbursement models.

2. Survey respondents also revealed that the business challenges they are most concerned about this year are *developing an integrated care model to provide "whole-person care."*

A considerable number of individuals with one or more behavioral health disorders also suffer from comorbid chronic physical diagnoses. By integrating behavioral health and physical health care, payers can begin to use standard attribution logic and move beyond bundled payments to align payment with outcomes. Federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) have increasingly integrated behavioral health into their primary care practices. Likewise, behavioral health organizations have begun to incorporate primary care into their services. Such moves will help the industry realize the potential of whole-person care, especially as we increasingly track patient outcomes.

3. Most survey respondents who plan to add or expand a specialty program in the next 24 months, revealed that the specialty program to be added would be *physical care.*

Whole-person, patient-centered care is pivotal to enhance the delivery of quality, outcomes, and cost improvements. Success will be measured by clinicians having the right information, reducing administrative burden, less time spent navigating technology tools, and the ability to act to the benefit of the patient.

4. Survey respondents also reported that their highest strategic priorities for the next 12–18 months involve *financial sustainability and increasing integration.*

One approach to achieving these priorities is optimizing revenue cycle management (RCM). The behavioral healthcare revenue cycle is particularly complex as it ties together the administrative and clinical functions for organizations and providers to get paid for their services. Optimizing the RCM process includes automating error processing, insurance verification, claims processing, reimbursement, and collections.

To successfully integrate care, an organization's billing team needs to thoroughly understand behavioral health and primary care reimbursement models. The experience brought by a revenue cycle management (RCM) services provider as well as knowledge of various specialties—especially for integrated care models—is one way to overcome complex billing challenges.

5. More than half of survey respondents expressed that *recruiting and retaining staff* was a business challenge they are most concerned about.

There is a nationwide staffing shortage across specialties for all levels of medical staff from front desk registration staff to nurses, and physicians. This gap is expected to widen as physicians, psychiatrists, and administrative leaders approach retirement. While individuals with milder mental health and substance use disorder conditions can be treated via telehealth and other virtual services that offer clinicians the opportunity to see more clients without the need for additional staff, this is not practical for individuals with more complex conditions.

This is just a snapshot of the findings from this recent member survey. Look for the full trends report coming soon for a deeper dive into these topics and more.



Integrating behavioral and physical health *is essential* to thriving in 2021

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