

Blue Shield of California Kidney Care Program

Provider Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

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Why is Blue Shield launching this program for its Medicare Advantage members with chronic kidney disease (CKD) or end-stage renal disease (ESRD)?

Blue Shield's mission is to ensure all Californians have access to high-quality health care at an affordable price. This program aims to bring comprehensive, high-quality support to Blue Shield Medicare Advantage plan members who are living with kidney disease, and to help reduce the cost of health care.

Why would members with CKD or ESRD need this program from Blue Shield? Does this program model have proven results with patient populations?

Blue Shield believes that members can benefit from additional, personalized, evidence-based support outside the four walls of their doctor's office. Engaging patients telephonically between office visits supplements the care and treatment plan from providers and can help members better manage their condition, with the goal of helping them live their best quality of life. This approach enables members to make informed decisions and remain engaged throughout their care journey with a renal nurse that is accessible by phone, in addition to the care they receive from their own doctors.

Studies have shown that programs such as this can reduce inpatient admissions, slow disease progression, optimize dialysis starts, lower medical expenditures and increase transplant evaluation rates (the initial step toward a kidney transplant).

Is the member or their provider charged for Kidney Care Program services?

No. Blue Shield provides this program at no additional cost to our members or providers.

Is any special action required by the provider to have members enrolled in the Kidney Care Program?

No. Eligible members will receive a letter or phone call from Blue Shield inviting them to participate in this program. Members can choose to accept or decline participation in the program with no impact to their plan benefits.

How will Blue Shield notify providers about their patients who enroll in this program?

The member's Primary Care Physician or Physician of Choice will receive a notification when a member enrolls in the Kidney Care Program. Providers will also have the opportunity to provide information to support the member's personalized treatment plan.

How can a provider refer a member to this program?

Blue Shield will identify members for the Kidney Care Program, based on specific program criteria. Eligible members with a Medicare Advantage plan are identified as having late-stage CKD or ESRD through claims data. Providers may also make direct referrals to the program by calling the Kidney Care Program at (866) 810-1492.

Does this program replace a member's Primary Care Physician or Physician of Choice and specialists?

No. Blue Shield members will continue their relationship with their existing providers. The Kidney Care Program team works collaboratively with a member's providers to provide supplemental care management services.

What types of services does the Kidney Care Program team provide to members?

Each member in the Kidney Care Program works with a nurse, engaging primarily by telephone. Kidney Care Program nurses are trained to supplement a provider's care by offering services such as:

- Helping implement the member's care plan
- Coordinating care between medical providers
- Answering condition- or medication-related questions from members
- Educating members on renal replacement therapy

In addition to nurses, the Kidney Care Program clinical team includes health advocates, social workers and a medical director who is board certified in nephrology and internal medicine.

What information do physicians receive about their patients who are engaged with the Kidney Care Program?

Program staff keep physicians informed about their patients by providing notification of program enrollment and additional outreach/coordination according to each member's individual needs. Program nurses will reach out to nephrologists on a case-by-case basis and may also engage the Kidney Care Program medical director to conduct peer-to-peer discussions.

What additional benefits do physicians get from this program?

The Kidney Care Program may help reduce the practice burden of physicians whose patients are in the program. Nurses connect with providers to make them aware of the member's participation in the program, communicate gaps in care, and work with them to achieve the goals of the care plan. By empowering members through education and support, we can help relieve some of the outreach to providers. We can also prepare the member for conversations with their provider, helping them to go into their appointments with an understanding that makes for a more efficient and effective visit.

Can providers choose to opt out themselves or their Blue Shield patients from the Kidney Care Program?

Providers are free to choose how much or how little they want to engage with the Kidney Care Program. Member participation is voluntary, and members can choose to opt out at any time; however, providers cannot opt out their patients.

Who can providers contact with questions about the Kidney Care Program?

For member-specific questions, providers can contact the Kidney Care Program directly by calling (866) 810-1492. For general information about Blue Shield's Kidney Care Program, providers can review this Kidney Care FAQ or reach out to their Blue Shield contact.

How does the program coordinate with a member who might be participating in another Blue Shield care coordination or care management program?

The Kidney Care Program team will be able to contact and coordinate with other Blue Shield programs as necessary, based on individual member needs, and make referrals to other resources as appropriate. Member participation in the Kidney Care Program is strictly voluntary (members may opt out any time) and does not affect access to benefits or other programs or resources.