



**BlueCross BlueShield**  
of Illinois

**WHITE PAPER**

**Providing a curative approach  
aimed at condition reversal.**

**FOCUSING  
IN ON  
METABOLIC  
HEALTH.**



## Metabolic health: A growing concern

Poor metabolic health is a growing problem in the U.S. One-third of adults in the U.S. are currently living with metabolic syndrome,<sup>1</sup> which can include abdominal obesity, high blood pressure, prediabetes or diabetes, high triglyceride levels, high HDL cholesterol levels and other complex conditions.

Given the numbers and how far-reaching these conditions are, there is no doubt that a significant portion of the workforce is either currently navigating or at risk for developing poor metabolic health. These conditions can lead to serious health complications, such as coronary heart disease, diabetes and stroke.<sup>4</sup>

Still, the future of metabolic health is not predetermined. There is no one-size-fits-all approach and these conditions cannot be treated in a vacuum. Comprehensive care management with holistic treatment guidance and healthy lifestyle support could lead to a state of condition reversal. Health plans and employers should work together to find ways to support diverse workforces with a healing approach. This means focusing on prevention and managing existing conditions.



**40.3%**  
of adults in the U.S.  
are obese.<sup>2</sup>

---

**50%**  
By 2030 that's estimated  
to reach 50%.<sup>3</sup>

## Prioritizing a healing-focused approach.

A healthy metabolism is when blood sugar, waist circumference, blood pressure, cholesterol and triglycerides are all within a clinically normal range.\* This starts by providing care that takes into account each employee's unique health journey, the impact of related conditions they may have and the value of a curative approach when possible.

\* Healthy metabolism criteria is having optimal levels of waist circumference (WC <102/88 cm for men/women), glucose (fasting glucose <100 mg/dL and hemoglobin A1c <5.7%), blood pressure (systolic <120 and diastolic <80 mmHg), triglycerides (<150 mg/dL), and high-density lipoprotein cholesterol ( $\geq$ 40/50 mg/dL for men/women), and not taking any related medication.

Source: NIH, Metab Syndr Relat Disord. 2019 Feb;17(1):46-52. doi: 10.1089/met.2018.0105. Epub 2018 Nov 27



**No matter the intervention, metabolic health is a lifelong journey.**

### Understanding no two metabolisms are alike.

The first step toward achieving better metabolic health is determining what's best for each individual within your employee population. Everyone has different needs, and no matter what treatment route is taken, it will take time to see results.

Let's consider obesity, for instance. It's a complex condition requiring different ways of treating those navigating it. Some people have a complex history with nutrition and might need nutrition education or counseling to heal the relationship with food they've developed over their lifetime. Others may live in food deserts, where fresh produce is not readily available and healthy food choices are extremely limited.

People with a BMI over 40 may need more than lifestyle changes to see real results. Our solutions help connect members for further intervention with our Blue Distinction® Center for Bariatric Surgery. This helps members find high-quality, low-cost options if further interventions are needed. **A thoughtful, measured approach to treatment that considers the unique individual is key to achieving better outcomes.** Work with your account representative to ensure this kind of holistic, individualized care is available to your employees.

## Navigating complex conditions.

The high degree of comorbidity, or interrelation between metabolic conditions and other health conditions, can make managing health more complex. **For example, high blood pressure increases the risk for heart disease and stroke, two leading causes of death for Americans.**<sup>5</sup> This can also occur the other way around, where those with heart and lung diseases are often at risk of chronic high blood pressure. There are also more extensive comorbidities. For example, diabetes often coincides with chronic health conditions. It, like other metabolic health conditions (including obesity), is also highly connected to mental health conditions like depression and anxiety. This can come at a real cost. Diabetes alone is estimated at \$412.9 billion annually<sup>6</sup> and approximately 12 billion working days are lost globally every year to depression and anxiety with \$1 trillion per year in lost productivity.<sup>7</sup>

This is why a wider view supported by comprehensive care is so vital. When we can look at the condition in multiple ways, we can often see a deeper connection. Treating the mental and physical roots of what an employee is dealing with can help providers get to the core of the issue to achieve better metabolic health.

## Treating the cause, not just the condition.

Over time, using medication to either manage an employee's condition or address their symptoms can come with the need to treat side effects with additional medication. That means the cost of time, attention and treatment required to manage most metabolic conditions will continue to rise incrementally. However, a holistic, curative approach aimed at healing the root cause of a condition can control and lower costs.

Connected care options maximize employee awareness of services available and allow access to the best course of treatment for their unique journey. A 2021 study performed by HealthScape Advisors showed that **Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois members with diabetes diagnoses who had connected medical and pharmacy benefits cost their employers 14% less, or an average of \$737 per member per year savings**, while members with carved-out pharmacy had 13% more ER and urgent professional visits.<sup>8</sup> Chronic conditions like diabetes need to be approached holistically in these ways, so that both employers and their employees can enjoy improved costs and outcomes.



**The cost of diabetes is estimated at \$412.9 billion annually.**

## Working together to improve metabolic health holistically.

Because of the rapid rise of metabolic health issues, understanding the causes, treatment and challenges is something we all need to be invested in. Employers, physicians and health plan administrators can make a big impact on how this condition can be managed or reversed.

BCBSIL is leading the way with an approach that prioritizes balancing lifestyle improvement with comprehensive care management, along with value-based options to support providers, employers and employee health. Our Metabolic Health Management Program incorporates interventions for both obesity and type 2 diabetes and is aimed at reducing long-term medical costs and promoting a healthy lifestyle by:

- Helping employees create an optimal lifestyle regimen.
- Addressing type 2 diabetes by treating the underlying causes of metabolic syndrome.
- Our metabolic health solutions create awareness of bariatric care services offered. Members may reach out to their customer service or Health Advocate to find out more.
- Providing value-based care options to address metabolic health in employee populations.



**Twin Health is offered as part of the Metabolic Health Management program. Members enrolled in Twin Health experienced a 2.2-point drop in A1C and a 1.9-point BMI reduction without GLP-1 medications.** The average member lost 14 pounds in six months, and 73% of members eliminated high-cost medications.<sup>9</sup> When it comes to getting to the heart of metabolic health, these numbers speak for themselves.

Our approach also supports other factors that have serious impacts. In some solutions, this includes offering ways to create healthy habits. It also means

helping employers and employees become aware of and address social determinants that affect metabolic health — the conditions of the environments in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. With a holistic approach, we can work together to improve metabolic health for every unique employee in your workforce.

In addition, Teladoc Health, Omada Health and Wondr Health programs are also offered under the Metabolic Health banner. Members will be directed to the program that best fits their specific circumstances.



## We're here for you, so you can be there for them.

Getting to the heart of metabolic health for condition reversal is possible. But employers need the right benefits design to give their employees the best resources for achieving good metabolic health. That's why we're here. Reach out to your account representative to discuss metabolic health management options for your organization.

To learn key takeaways about metabolic health, be sure to [check out our infographic](#).

- 1 UCLA Health, "Metabolic Syndrome Is Both Preventable and Reversible," August 23, 2024
- 2 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey, August 2021–August 2023
- 3 Business Group on Health, "An Employer's Practical Playbook for Treating Obesity," December 11, 2024
- 4 National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, "What Is Metabolic Syndrome?" nhlbi.nih.gov, retrieved December 17, 2024
- 5 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "High Blood Pressure Risk Factors," cdc.gov, retrieved December 17, 2024
- 6 American Diabetes Association, "New American Diabetes Association Report Finds Annual Costs of Diabetes to be \$412.9 Billion," November 1, 2023
- 7 World Health Organization, "Mental Health at Work," who.int, retrieved December 17, 2024
- 8 Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois, "Unlocking the Secret: Connecting Medical and Pharmacy," 2022
- 9 Twin Health, based on average member results using Twin Health data. Individual results may vary, September, 2024

Twin Health is an independent company that has contracted with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois to provide care and disease management for members with coverage through BCBSIL.

Teladoc is an independent company that has contracted with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois to provide virtual medical care for members with coverage through BCBSIL.

Omada is an independent company that has contracted with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois to provide chronic disease prevention solutions for members with coverage through BCBSIL.

Wondr Health is an independent company that has contracted with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois to provide a metabolic syndrome reduction program for members with coverage through BCBSIL.

BCBSIL makes no endorsement, representations or warranties regarding third-party vendors and the products and services offered by them.