



## CASE STUDY

# Signify Health clinicians identify and help meet behavioral health needs of Medicare Advantage members.

Including behavioral health referrals as part of in-home health evaluation visits may lead to better outcomes for members, cost savings for health plans, and improved satisfaction among members.

## Setting the Stage for Holistic Health

Mental health is directly connected to overall health and well-being – the two components of well health are not segregated in the body. However, they are generally treated separately by different specialists. Signify Health clinicians and health care teams understand that while physical health and behavioral health are treated separately, it is essential that these conditions are recognized and treated with the same level of urgency. Our holistic approach at Signify Health helps to connect physical and behavioral health concerns to prevent siloed conditions and to help improve member outcomes.

According to the [World Health Organization](#), approximately 14% of adults aged 60 and over live with a mental disorder. Mental health conditions among older people are often underrecognized and undertreated, and the stigma surrounding these conditions can result in a reluctance to seek help.

Even otherwise healthy older adults are at risk of developing mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety disorders. As people age, they are more likely to experience several conditions simultaneously, including behavioral health concerns.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, it is estimated that 20% of people aged 55 years or older experience some type of mental health concern. The most common conditions include anxiety, severe cognitive impairment, and mood disorders (including depression).



**“The presence of depressive disorders often adversely affects the course of and complicates the treatment of other chronic diseases, yet in 80% of cases, depression is a treatable condition.”**

**Although the rate of older adults with depressive symptoms tends to increase with age, depression is not a normal part of growing older.**

## What is an In-Home Health Evaluation?

The Signify Health In-Home Health Evaluation (IHE) is a health visit performed in the comfort of a health plan members' home by a licensed clinician. The IHE provides unparalleled insights into the members' individualized needs, including clinical, social, and behavioral. Lasting up to an hour, the IHE offers the individual extended one-on-one time with a Signify Health clinician allowing the time needed to thoroughly discuss the member's health and treatment plan.

The IHE provides more opportunity for the clinician to complete a thorough and holistic assessment of members and includes:



## Care Coordination Pathways and In-home Health Evaluations

Care Coordination Pathways is a service that Signify Health offers to support better access to preventive care, which also helps boost health plans' Star rating programs. The offering guides members on their health journey by facilitating connections with primary and specialty medical or behavioral care or a pharmacy program as appropriate for each member's needs.

As part of the IHE, a Signify Health clinician performs a Patient Health Questionnaire-4 (PHQ-4), which measures psychological distress. Results from the PHQ-4 may lead to conducting the PHQ-9, a standardized screening tool for monitoring and measuring the severity of depression.

The Care Coordination Pathways service, when elected by health plans, includes the ability to refer identified members to behavioral health providers.

## Identification of Behavioral Health Concerns Across the IHE member Population

Recent Signify Health IHE results validated the risk of mental illness in elderly adults. Of the total population analyzed, 32% of members completed the PHQ-9 screening; the results validated the psychological distress identified by the PHQ-4 screening. Of that demographic, a concerning 3% were found to have Major Depressive Disorder. The demographic with the highest concern was the members with dual diagnoses (3.9%), who had been diagnosed with a mental health disorder and a substance use disorder. Also of concern for Major Depressive Disorder was the general Medicare population (3.3%).

## Identifying Behavioral Health Care Gaps

A Signify Health analysis conducted research in collaboration with a large, regional Medicare Advantage (MA) plan (the “Plan”) and identified a behavioral health care gap in 43% of members. To address the unmet need, Signify Health and Plan partnered with a behavioral health organization that specializes in matching members to in-network behavioral health providers and services.

From behavioral assessments and Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) screenings performed during IHEs from December 2021 to December 2023, Signify Health identified Plan members needing behavioral health services. It referred those members to a mental health care coordinator to facilitate behavioral health appointments.

### Signify Health found:



Behavioral health care gaps in **43%** of the Plan’s members.



Behavioral services were needed by **226** of the Plan’s members.

## Using Care Coordination to Support Appointment Scheduling

Once a behavioral health need was identified, Signify Health referred the member to a mental health care coordination organization working with the Plan. The organization then initiated a referral to a behavioral health provider within one day of receiving the member’s information. Based on data provided by the organization, they could secure behavioral health appointments with a treating clinician on average 13 days after receipt of the referral from Signify Health - well above the industry average of 48 days. This highlights the expediency of connecting members in need with clinicians. On average, the member’s first appointment was scheduled within 28 days of the initial referral from the Signify Health Care Coordinator.

Speed to care is a valid concern. Research has demonstrated a decades-old national challenge of long wait times for individuals in need of seeing a behavioral health provider. According to an **impact report** by the Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic, the average wait time for an appointment is 48 days across the United States. The collaboration between the Plan, Signify Health, and the mental health care coordination agency allowed the Plan’s members to experience significantly less wait time for an appointment than the national average. Additional results from Signify Health’s analysis include:

**76%** of the 226 members expressed a desire to be referred for therapy services, while 27% expressed a desire to be referred for medication management services. Notably, members could express a need for referrals for both services.

**41%** of the 226 members referred by Signify Health to the mental health care coordination organization were scheduled for appointments, and 67% completed them.

**73%** of the Plan’s members stayed engaged with their behavioral health provider following the appointment.

In August 2023, while conducting an IHE for a Plan member, a Signify Health clinician identified an unmet need as the member was struggling after their child died unexpectedly. The member was referred to a mental health care coordination organization to facilitate scheduling an appointment for grief counseling. That same day, when the referral from Signify Health was received, a behavioral health navigator from the organization matched the member to a local practice offering counseling services. The grieving member attended their first appointment after only 12 days of being identified as needing care services. As of January 2024, the member continues to be engaged in regular therapy sessions and has demonstrated progress since their first appointment.

## Synergistic Scenarios for Health Plans and Members

As a result of the collaboration between the large, regional MA plan, Signify Health, and the mental health care coordination organization, five key benefits to the Plan and its members were identified.



**Improved care outcomes:** Addressing behavioral health care needs when identified impacts a person’s behavioral health status and may lead to improved overall health outcomes. For example, managing depression or anxiety may improve adherence to treatment plans and reduce the risk of complications.



**Cost savings:** By addressing behavioral health issues early, health plans may potentially reduce the need for more intensive and costly treatments later.



**Enhanced member satisfaction:** Providing comprehensive care addressing behavioral health care needs may increase member satisfaction. Inclusive health care demonstrates that the health plan is attentive to the holistic needs of its members, not just their physical health.



**Reduced hospitalizations:** Addressing behavioral health issues proactively may help prevent crises that may lead to emergency department visits and hospitalizations, reducing costs for the health plan and the member.



**Improved regulatory compliance:** Many regulatory bodies, including the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), emphasize the importance of addressing behavioral health needs. By including behavioral health referrals as Signify Health’s In-Home Health Evaluations, health plans can meet regulatory expectations. By providing members access to Care Coordination Pathways or similar programs, expedited access to necessary services and programs can also enhance the member and health plan experience.



## Future Steps in Holistic Health Care

Signify Health clinicians and the health care community understand that behavioral health must be recognized and treated in all Americans, including older adults, with the same urgency as physical health. Signify Health's IHE and Care Coordination Pathways services connect historically siloed behavioral and physical health to help improve member care outcomes.

This case study has demonstrated that when Signify Health clinicians identify behavioral health concerns during the IHE and health plans elect Signify Health's Care Coordination Pathway services; health plans may experience quicker intervention and better outcomes for members, cost savings by avoiding emergent and urgent behavioral health service utilization, and improved member satisfaction.

**The future of improved health care will embody a holistic approach that includes treating the person rather than treating the illness.**



For more information  
on Signify Health, visit  
[signifyhealth.com/healthplans](https://signifyhealth.com/healthplans)



## About Signify Health

**Signify Health** is a leading health care platform that leverages advanced analytics, technology, and nationwide health care provider networks to create and power value-based payment programs. Our mission is to transform how care is paid for and delivered so that people can enjoy more healthy, happy days at home. Our solutions support value-based payment programs by aligning financial incentives around outcomes, providing tools to health plans and health care organizations designed to assess and manage risk and identify actionable opportunities for improved patient outcomes, coordination and cost-savings. Through our platform, we coordinate what we believe is a holistic suite of clinical, social, and behavioral services to address an individual's health care needs and prevent adverse events that drive excess cost, all while shifting services toward the home. For more information on how we are taking health homeward, visit us at [signifyhealth.com](https://signifyhealth.com).