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Blue Cross of Idaho Health Service, Inc., a not-for-profit mutual insurance company based in Meridian, Idaho, is a leader in delivering innovative health insurance products, services and information to more than 585,670 members. For 76 years, the company has advocated on behalf of its members to ensure they have access to high-quality healthcare at the lowest possible cost. It also serves the people of Idaho through support of community organizations, programs and events that promote good health. Blue Cross of Idaho Health Service, Inc. is an independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. For more information, visit bcidaho.com

We're Ready to Address Health Disparities in Idaho

By Mike Reynoldson, Senior Vice President for Government Affairs and Public Relations for Blue Cross of Idaho & Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation Board Vice Chair

The global COVID-19 pandemic has allowed Idahoans to reflect on the importance of themselves and their family's health and well-being. More than ever, all Idahoans want and deserve safe homes, connection to loved ones, healthy meals, and access to healthcare.



Mike Reynoldson

But not all Idahoans have the means to achieve these fundamental needs, and COVID-19 magnified the gaps among marginalized Idahoans. A recent report commissioned by the Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation for Health found that 40% of Idaho could not afford basic needs such as housing, food, childcare, and healthcare.

On January 21, 2021, President Joe Biden issued an executive order to address the "disproportionate and severe impact of COVID-19 on communities of color and other underserved populations." The executive order will also address those in rural areas and Tribal communities that have healthcare access issues.

The Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation for Health supports bringing greater equality to underserved communities and demographics and want to use the executive order to springboard into more work in Idaho.

Idaho is a unique state. We are home to five Native American tribes. We have 18 counties with fewer than six people per square mile and thousands of refugees have resettled in Idaho to escape political or religious persecution.

Each demographic has its challenges, but all have one thing in common: we have left them out of critical conversations to shape policy and find solutions to bring equality to all. And because of that, their struggles have amplified.

The Foundation's report also found 38% of rural individuals and families reported their primary care provider was between 25-100 miles from their home. High-quality primary care is essential and can decrease chronic illness and premature death across all populations. Further, we know that access to primary care lowers healthcare costs for

everyone and can reduce hospitalizations and visits to the emergency room.

Lower population densities are what people are looking for when they move to Idaho. However, some challenges come with a sparse area: lack of high-speed broadband, poor transportation infrastructure, and sometimes unreliable electricity.

We believe government can help lead change, but Idaho brings a specific set of challenges that are much different from any other state. Therefore, we believe the bulk of the groundwork is needed on a state and community level.

Idaho is growing quickly, which makes this an ideal time to bring groups together to have tough conversations we might have ignored in the past. Additionally, by bringing more people to the table, we can find Idaho's unique solutions and maintain our state's core values. It is possible to change our mental models while maintaining personal responsibility and freedom.



It's why we believe solutions to health equity will come when a diverse Idaho audience comes together and confronts the tough questions.

We are ready to follow President Biden's executive order and address Idaho's healthcare disparities. Greater inclusion with all of Idaho will bring each greater resources to improve their health, well-being and an increased ability to contribute to our state's future.

HERE FOR THE ROAD AHEAD

At Blue Cross of Idaho, we're working every day to make affordable healthcare a reality—from value-based networks that help our members pay less for care that works, to using data to look at healthcare in a whole new way. It's all part of creating a simpler, more affordable future of healthcare across our state.

Learn more at
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