

Special Bulletin

For professional providers

February 14, 2024

Heart Health Month: Helping Patients with Diabetes Avoid Cardiovascular Complications

Diabetes and cardiovascular disease are a debilitating and often deadly one-two punch. More than 38 million adults in the US have diabetes¹, and nearly all of them are considered high risk for developing cardiovascular disease, which is the leading cause of death among people with diabetes².

Cardiovascular disease includes the following conditions:

- Heart Failure (HF)
- Ischemic Heart Disease
- Peripheral Artery Disease
- Stroke

Complex and Challenging

Managing diabetes — while also trying to avoid cardiovascular complications — is extremely challenging. The absence of symptoms early on often creates a false sense of heart healthiness for people with diabetes. Misconceptions about disease severity and associated morbidity/mortality can often result in patient complacency. The high cost of medications presents financial difficulties for patients with limited means³.

For Primary Care Physicians (PCPs), some of the challenges include:

- Not enough time with patients due to high patient demand for general practitioners
- Underestimation of the need for patient self-monitoring and autonomy
- Insufficient knowledge of pharmacological and insulin treatments
- Concerned about medications' side effects (i.e., hypoglycemia)
- Lack of coordination with specialists, such as endocrinologists and cardiologists

Engage, Educate, Empower

Most Americans have a positive view of their doctor, according to the [Pew Research Center](#). **Heart Health Month** is an excellent time for practices and providers to begin building even stronger

relationships with patients who have diabetes. By doing so, PCPs can educate and empower those patients to make changes that improve their quality of life.

Highmark has educational resources available — that practices can order at no cost — to help members better manage diabetes:

- [Diabetes Management Brochure and Tracker](#) (available in Spanish)
- [Diabetes Eye Exam Screening Reminder Card](#)

To order, go to the **Provider Resource Center > EDUCATION/MANUALS > Inventory Request Form > Select Printable Item**. Click the down arrow and then select the items you wish to order. Complete the form and click the **ADD TO ORDER** button.

For patients who are **pre-diabetic**, Highmark offers the **Diabetes Prevention Program**. Learn more about the program [here](#).

References

¹[Statistics About Diabetes | ADA](#)

²[Diabetes and Heart Disease | Johns Hopkins Medicine](#)

³[Prevention and Management Of Cardiovascular Disease in Patients with Diabetes: Current Challenges and Opportunities - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#)

The following entities serve central and southeastern Pennsylvania and are independent licensees of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association: Highmark Inc. d/b/a Highmark Blue Shield, Highmark Benefits Group Inc., Highmark Health Insurance Company, Highmark Choice Company or Highmark Senior Health Company.

All references to “Highmark” in this document are references to the Highmark company that is providing the member’s health benefits or health benefit administration and/or to one or more of its affiliated Blue companies.

Highmark does not recommend particular treatments or health care services. This information is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. You should determine the appropriate treatment and follow-up with your patient. Coverage of services is subject to the terms of each member’s benefit plan. Additionally, state laws and regulations governing health insurance, health plans and coverage may apply and will vary from state to state.

