

NEWS RELEASE



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Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida's HMO, Health Options, Inc., Awarded National Medicare Managed Care Demonstration Project

JACKSONVILLE -- Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida's (BCBSF) health maintenance organization, Health Options, Inc., has been awarded a national Medicare managed care demonstration project that will enhance and expand medical services for patients with End Stage Renal Disease (ESRD) in three South Florida counties. Health Options is one of only four HMOs nationwide that was awarded the project by the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA).

"Our primary objective with this demonstration project is to enhance the quality of life for the 4,788 beneficiaries in Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties who are affected by this disease," said Lynn Esposito, BCBSF director.

Esposito explained that Health Options will focus its efforts on an integrated care delivery system that uses a continuous quality improvement model of service. "The project will ensure that patients have access to a full range of medical benefits, including preventive services, additional medications, and other enhanced benefits, including transportation, to coordinate the full spectrum of care," she said.

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According to Esposito, Health Options also intends to provide patients with educational programs as part of the project's integrated approach. In addition, a multi-disciplinary team consisting of a nephrologist, nurse practitioner, care coordinator, social worker, rehabilitation specialist and facility staff will provide coordinated patient care.

Health Options will work with selected providers from its network in the three-county area for the demonstration project. They include dialysis facilities, nephrology physicians, and a transplant facility. Other partners will provide transportation, rehabilitation, nursing home, and home dialysis services. "As with every aspect of the project, the emphasis will be on patient services that reflect only the highest quality care," said Esposito. Health Options hopes to have the project in operation by the fall of 1997.

BCBSF performs its Medicare business under contract, through the national Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association for Part A. For Part B, BCBSF works directly with the Health Care Financing Administration, the federal government agency that oversees Medicare. Medicare contracts are performed on a cost reimbursement basis. There are no profits derived by BCBSF under these contracts, only reimbursement of budgeted costs approved by the federal government.

BCBSF and Health Options, Inc., are independent licensees of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association, an association of independent Blue Cross and Blue Shield companies nationwide. A financially strong, tax-paying mutual insurance company, BCBSF is subject to the same regulation by the Department of Insurance as other insurers operating in Florida.