



Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services

Written Testimony by Steve Ringel

President, Ohio Market, CareSource

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Chairman Roemer, Ranking Member West, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on behalf of CareSource. As you know, CareSource is a non-profit health plan, headquartered in Dayton, Ohio and Ohio's only homegrown managed care organization. We have been a vital part of the fabric of Ohio for 32 years and today provide coverage to nearly 1.4 million Ohioans, while providing employment to nearly 4,000 Ohioans.

As we look towards the future and contemplate the nature of the FY 22-23 biennial budget, we must reflect on this past year, which was without question the most difficult year in recent memory. The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated lives, the economy and nearly every aspect of daily life for Ohioans. Since the beginning of the pandemic, CareSource has recognized the importance of our role as a health insurer and large employer in the state. With this in mind, we continue to innovate and lead in finding ways to support the well-being of our members, partners, vendors, employees and the community at large.

At CareSource, we are proud to be the highest rated Medicaid health plan in Ohio, while also being the top choice of members, with 54% of Medicaid recipients who choose a plan, choosing CareSource—more than all other plans combined. During this unprecedented time, CareSource has leveraged its expertise and resources to make an impact in a number of critical areas for Ohioans.

For the purposes of this testimony, although difficult to segregate into distinct activities, we have bucketed our work into four primary categories: efforts to support community based providers, member focused assistance, innovation and direct financial assistance and investments.

CARESOURCE HIGHLIGHTS:

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY BASED PROVIDERS

In the early months of the pandemic our Provider Relations team worked closely with our providers to understand where they needed our assistance. Through this outreach, we recognized providers were scrambling to set up testing sites, working to understand telehealth technology and protocols, while experiencing a decrease in routine office visits. Based on insights from our listening sessions we then worked internally to identify how we could assist providers across our network in accordance with all of the Federal and State orders being issued on a daily basis. We evaluated our processes, evaluated member and provider call data and implemented the following:

- Removed all barriers to COVID-19 testing
- Lifted prior authorization requirements for both pharmacy and medical services
- Implemented the telehealth emergency rule
- Extended 30-day pharmacy fills to 90-day fills on certain drugs
- Extended Claims timely filing requirement to 365 days
- Expanded transportation services to include grocery stores and foodbanks
- Modified flu testing policy to support current testing protocols

We continued to stay close to our provider community to ensure we listened to their challenges and worked to support their daily changing needs. We supported Long-Term Care Facilities with critical immediate and unmet needs:

- First plan on-site testing with Cleveland Clinic training
- Provided PPE
- Provided weekend food delivery to support the initial staffing crisis
- Deployed iPads for telehealth visits and family support
- Provided on-site support for the Cleveland Department of Health for 6 weeks
- Offered an education COVID Series for all care management
- Conducted window visits to provide care management support to isolated members

Collaborated with Cleveland Clinic to increase testing in nursing facility

With roughly 20% of Ohio's COVID-19 cases in long-term care facilities, testing residents and staff members was critical to helping eliminate the spread of the coronavirus. Nurses from CareSource and Cleveland Clinic volunteered to support screening more than 500 staff members at Menorah Park, the largest nursing facility in Ohio, and Montefiore senior living campus.



“The CareSource team of nurses and the team from Cleveland Clinic were outstanding! The results of these actions enabled Menorah Park, one of the largest skilled nursing communities in Ohio and the nation, to successfully test our employees, which ultimately keeps our elderly clients safe from COVID-19. We appreciate the true dedication and hard work of everyone who volunteered.”

Richard Schwalberg, Menorah Park Chief Operating Officer

Aided health systems

The overcapacity of intensive care unit (ICU) beds created many challenges. CareSource provided vital support including:

- Coordinating stakeholder communication strategies
- Working with hospitals to implement new state regulations and protocols
- Detecting network vulnerabilities and ensuring members have continued access to care
- Assisting providers in obtaining technological solutions for remote patient services

Helped prevent providers from going out of business

CareSource has a history of maintaining positive provider relations and providing comprehensive networks for our members. Our provider representatives are embedded within the communities we serve and can quickly respond to challenges and concerns. These close relationships enabled us to understand and mitigate financial liquidity and cash flow issues during the significant shift in utilization to telehealth from other traditional service delivery options.

During the pandemic, we have been in frequent communications with our providers to assess their needs and improve their ability to care for both COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 patients. Furthermore, our presence has enabled us to identify emerging COVID-19 trends, which we share with Ohio Department of Medicaid and other Managed Care Plans.

Provided direct financial support to nursing facility staff in Ohio

CareSource donated \$10,000 worth of gift cards to CPAN (Comprehensive Post-Acute and Long-term Care Network of Skilled Nursing Facilities) to support nursing facility providers during the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. The gift was to recognize nursing facility staff including nurses and aides, social workers, therapists, activities staff, support staff, maintenance and case managers; all of whom are working to support health needs and socialization to residents during this crisis.

"Our team was thrilled to learn CareSource was providing our organization such a generous number of gift cards that we could provide to some of our facilities who are facing challenging needs in their day-to-day operations with their residents and staff. I am impressed by the support CareSource is providing our organization and specifically to the skilled nursing facilities that have been hardest hit by the COVID-19 health crisis in Ohio."

Carol A. Turni, CPAN CEO

Ensured access to care and prevented overburdening the health system

In order to avoid overburdening Ohio's health care system and supporting access to care for all Ohioans we focused on five critical work areas:

- Reducing COVID-19 risk for vulnerable populations receiving care in congregate settings by distributing care kits that included PPE supplies. We also conducted a pilot program with five nursing facilities through which we distributed tablets to members so they could video chat with their family and friends. The pilot enabled us to assess the impact of these devices on social isolation.
- Engaging with members recently released from prison who need to reintegrate during a socially isolated time. Many of these members are under parole and require assistance with food delivery.

- Encouraging members to stay on top of routine checkups, including well-child visits and immunizations.
- Expanding transportation options to mitigate public transit challenges.
- Championing the rollout of telehealth service capabilities for members to stay in touch with physical and behavioral health providers.

MyCare teams supported frontline workers

Throughout 2020, CareSource case management teams looked for opportunities to support frontline workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Team members provided care packages to emergency department and case management employees at local hospitals and delivered Thanksgiving dinner to first responders. For the holiday season, they collected items to provide the three COVID units at St. Elizabeth Boardman Hospital with nonperishable food, snacks and bottled water to help keep their essential workers refreshed during busy and stressful shifts.



"Thank you so much for recognizing our staff and for sending in goodie bags for our COVID workers. The efforts to care for our community during this pandemic have been heroic. Your acknowledgement means so much."

Genie Aubel, President and CEO, St. Elizabeth Boardman Hospital

MEMBER ASSISTANCE

Responded to member needs and ensured continuity of care

During this crisis, we have worked diligently to respond to member needs and ensure continuity of care, especially for those living in congregate settings. We participate in a nursing facility (NF) and assisting living facility (ALF) work group with clinical leaders and subject matter experts from all MCPs and Medicare-Medicaid plans (MMP) in Ohio as well as Department of Health and Nursing Facility organizations to address challenges as they arise. Strategies that we have incorporated include:

- Moving members from congregate settings to the home
- Creating and refining facility processes for infection control and prevention measures (including aftercare for COVID-positive residents)
- Supporting safe care transitions for COVID-positive residents
- Increasing social connectedness through calling residents and facilitating window visits
- Testing facility members and staff
- Offering volunteers to support contact tracing

Partnered to scale and share best practices

We developed a partnership with the Post-Acute Rapid Response Team (PARRT) and supported the development of a business plan that will allow for scaling and sustainability of the



program into other areas of the state. Ultimately, we aim to embed MCP staff members into targeted NFs and ALFs that have the highest concentration of Medicaid recipients in Ohio to provide our resources and expertise.

Enhanced support for members who tested positive for COVID-19

CareSource quickly developed a protocol for supporting members who tested positive for COVID-19. We reached out to over 10,000 COVID positive members and their providers and provided case management services where appropriate and we continue to do so.

Protected members

In compliance with Care Management Emergency Protocol guidance, all face-to-face Care Management activities were suspended (as of 3/17/20) and replaced with virtual communication between Care Managers and members. Care Management staff ensured member education regarding social distancing protocols occurred during each engagement to reinforce the critical nature of limiting the spread of the virus. Member Advisory Councils were moved to virtual meetings in Quarter 2 of 2020 to allow members to continue to provide important feedback to inform CareSource operations and decision-making.

Championed “Strive for Five” challenge

We supported a challenge by Governor DeWine and Lori Criss, Director for Ohio’s Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services, to help people with their mental well-being during this time of isolation. CareSource implemented a social media campaign (#OHStrive5) highlighting all the great work our care managers, health partner representatives and community marketing representatives are doing on a daily basis and encouraging others to make the time to reach out to others who might be feeling isolated.

Mailed PPE kits to 140,000 high-risk members

We recognized that our members did not have access to PPE to support their changing needs. We identified our members who were at high risk and provided personal protective equipment. We also continued to reinforce health reminders such as social distancing and hand washing protocols. In addition, we encouraged them to maintain their normal routine of vaccines and essential health screenings.

National leading member satisfaction results

Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (CAHPS®) survey results in the Medicaid population demonstrate CareSource Ohio is in the TOP 12 plans nationally and best in the state of Ohio with 4.5 STAR performance for two years running. This performance is driven primarily by indicators for member satisfaction with health plan services including customer service (4.0 STARs), and satisfaction with plan providers (5.0 STARs). Learning from member feedback is a critical part of CareSource’s success in this area and it is important to maintain this high standard throughout the pandemic.

Targeted outreach to high-risk groups and minorities.

Using an in-house dashboard to identify virus prevalence and target outreach, CareSource serves our most vulnerable members by employing strategies such as:

- Conducting education on virus symptoms and prevention
- Maintaining routine appointments and medical services

- Ensuring members have sufficient supplies and medications
- Collaborating with the state and other health plans to implement new policies or modify existing policies to address member and provider needs

Enhanced transportation benefits

We enhanced our non-emergency transportation benefit to allow for pick-up from food banks, school food distributions, and online grocery pick-up locations.

Uplifted spirits through window visits to nursing homes

MyCare Long-Term Case Managers initiated a special way to make members in long-term care facilities in Stark and Wayne Counties in Ohio feel special as social distancing protocols continue due to COVID-19. With members still in isolation with no group activities and no ability to see their friends, we had the opportunity to make sure they continued to receive compassionate interactions and understand that CareSource is still there to support them.

Long-Term Case Managers created heartfelt posters that were shared through the windows at one-story facilities along with a phone call to the member so they could have a two-way conversation.



"Seeing the smiles on our members' faces was the best part. As a Case Manager, it's been challenging not seeing our members, so this was a great opportunity to connect with them."

- *Bridget, Team Lead, Case Management, MyCare*

The outreach that the Long-Term Case Managers provided also assisted staff working in the facilities since they are juggling so many patients at one time. The window visits created additional social connections for the members, which were very much appreciated by the staff.

Outreach and education for those with complex health conditions and comorbidities.

Using calling and texting campaigns along with the member portal, we educated members on virus symptoms and prevention, COVID-19 policies and telehealth options. While telehealth plays a vital role in member care, those with complex conditions still require routine provider and lab visits. To help our members receive these services, we developed materials to alleviate their fears of in-office appointments, which we witnessed as members deferred their appointments and medically necessary services at the beginning of the pandemic.

Our care management team educates members on provider office safety measures and opportunities for "drive-thru" lab services. For members who are COVID-19 positive, we prioritize their care by enrolling them into care management upon receipt of test result notification.

Reinforced importance of prevention services

Our care managers also remind members of the importance of prevention services and ensure that they have access to the items and supplies necessary for disease management. For example, we encourage 90-day medication cycles to reduce the frequency of pharmacy visits and potential virus exposure.

Held vaccine clinics

In partnership with Montgomery County Public Health and Dayton Children's, CareSource held a back-to-school vaccination event to address state requirements for all 7th-grade students to have a TDAP and meningitis vaccine and all 12th-grade students to have a second meningitis vaccine before beginning the school year.

Prioritized highest risk members

From our experience, we have seen that prioritizing outreach to complex populations has led to an overall improvement in health outcomes and risk reduction, including members receiving private duty nursing and those experiencing:

- ESRD
- Pregnancy
- Respiratory diseases
- Active cancer
- Diabetes

Expanded transportation options to respond to our member needs

During the initial days of the pandemic, we discovered that our ESRD members were unable to travel to their dialysis clinics and that those with COVID-19 were going to the emergency room because of public transportation challenges. We quickly held a forum with our ESRD providers and were able to identify clinics for those with and without COVID-19 to ensure that all our ESRD members received their care while limiting the risk of spread.

Supporting state efforts to drive COVID-19 vaccination progress

CareSource has been coordinating with the Ohio Department of Medicaid to assist in communication and vaccine distribution. This includes work on the creation of vaccination pods (e.g., Convention Center), mobile units and immunizing families of elderly members of varying ages to increase efficiency. Additionally, we are supporting by:

- Monitoring pharmacy and claims data
- Determining who has received vaccines
- Looking for health disparities and prioritizing outreach to those members
- Offering transportation to get to provider/pharmacy

Conducting aggressive outreach to support COVID vaccine

CareSource has created a multi-pronged, multi-channel campaign to encourage and enable members to get the COVID-19 vaccine.

- Leveraging outbound call campaign, hold messages, member newsletter, website and "lead by example" media strategy

- Care management outreach to high-risk members as well as members who received their first dose to get them to obtain their second dose
- Working with EMS, pharmacies and other critical access providers to administer the vaccine as it becomes more widely available

Providing volunteers for vaccine efforts

We have offered employees paid time off to volunteer and assist health partners who have requested support in expediting the vaccine effort. This is entirely voluntary, but our employees continue to express interest in helping and we are proud to have collaborated with our state and provider partners to establish the Clinical Volunteer Network as the primary volunteer channel.

Driving participation in special population town halls

CareSource leveraged both its member communications channels and its employee advocates to amplify awareness for the state's virtual town hall events targeted at providing information for underserved groups and driving equality in health care.

Collaborated with other managed care plans for the good of all Ohioans

CareSource has worked expeditiously to identify and anticipate any challenges from COVID-19. We have worked in concert with our state partners and other health plans to realign policies with emergent needs, share our experiences, determine best practices, and identify concerning trends. We participate with our state partners and other MCPs to implement policy changes that enable us to best serve our members and support our providers during this time, such as lifting prior authorization restrictions. As one example, in collaboration with other MCPs in Ohio, we formed a transportation work group to meet non-emergency medical transportation needs together.

INNOVATION

Expanded telehealth benefit

After many proactive discussions with our state partners, we developed a plan to move forward with telehealth expansion while aiming to prevent confusion in the community. We leveraged our strong ties with our provider network to clarify how reimbursement would be managed and to effectively direct members to telehealth services.

Responded quickly to lead implementation

On March 27, CareSource established temporary guidelines to reimburse telehealth appointments and communicated this announcement across our membership via text and other mediums. Additionally, we worked with other health plans to ensure that our communications accurately aligned.

Provided immediate support to providers without telehealth capabilities

CareSource worked with its vendor, MyIdeal Doctor, to expand access to its telehealth provider network as a result of increased demand in telehealth services. This served as an interim solution for providers who had not yet modified their systems to support telemedicine capabilities.

Increased member education about telehealth

CareSource increased member education about our telehealth vendor partner, MyIdeal Doctor, in April 2020 to educate members about using telehealth as an option when they had urgent needs and could not get into their normal provider offices. CareSource also emphasized this as an alternative to the Emergency Department. CareSource shared member communication through the member portal, email, SMS text messaging, mailings, and on hold messaging.

Ensured continuity of behavioral health services

For behavioral telehealth services, we connected members to providers with telehealth capabilities, which ensured continuity of services while also opening opportunities to get more members into care.

Launched pharmacist provider status pilot

In August CareSource announced a six-month pilot program reimbursing pharmacists for clinical services provided to Medicaid patients in Ohio. The Pharmacist Provider Status Pilot program began with two sites near Dayton, Ohio: an independent pharmacy in a rural community, Camden Village Pharmacy, and an inner-city independent pharmacy, ZIKS Pharmacy.

Pharmacists involved in the pilot have collaborative practice agreements with physicians, nurse practitioners, or physicians, and the pharmacists will focus on CareSource patients that they have identified as being at high-risk or in need of care for tobacco cessation, opioid management, diabetes, and/or asthma.

For patients with diabetes, for example, the pharmacists participating in the pilot program will provide diabetes education, adjust medications, perform foot checks and blood sugar testing.

The pharmacists in the pilot will be working closely with CareSource pharmacists and with the Ohio Pharmacists Association Provider Status Task Force.

The pharmacist provider status pilot adds to the Value-Based Reimbursement (VBR) opportunity, that CareSource released in January 2020. The VBR program is the first of its kind in the state and allows for pharmacies to achieve payment for increasing the quality of patient care outside of the traditional pharmacy benefits manager reimbursement model.

Enabled access to care in rural communities

The pharmacist provider status proved critical in Camden Village, when the rural independent pharmacy stepped up to provide patient care when the community's local primary care physician was diagnosed with COVID-19 and had to cancel patient visits. The pharmacists provided patient care during the provider's absence including vaccinations, disease state follow up and OTC counselling.





Invested in digital equity

At the start of the pandemic and through the stay-at-home order, we were all forced to work and school our children in our homes. This highlighted an additional crisis in the U.S. of digital inequities. Not all families had financial access to the internet, access to free Wi-Fi services and laptops to enable learning and working from home. In partnership with Montgomery County, Greater Dayton Premier Management, Cincinnati Bell Inc. and multiple Dayton-based organizations, CareSource invested in bringing high-speed Wi-Fi and Chromebook devices to more than 1,000 residents living in five housing communities. CareSource committed \$400,000 to continue to address the digital divide in underserved communities in Montgomery County and to support the long-term sustainability of the county's Cares Act investment. We see firsthand through our members how the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for digital equity and want to be part of this effort that will provide opportunities for more than 1,000 individuals to go to school, work from home, access telehealth services and search for employment.

Supported Homeless, Domestic Violence Programs

CareSource provided a grant to the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio to redistribute the funding to dozens of local agencies that are battling the dual crises of COVID-19 and homelessness this winter. This effort supports community organizations that are struggling to continue providing shelter and housing services due to increased need stemming from the economic recession. COHHIO will regrant the money to help local homeless agencies, housing providers, and domestic violence shelters obtain critical supplies and cover increased costs associated with the pandemic.

Developed strategies for homeless individuals

Recognizing that Ohio's homeless and shelter residents lack a safe place to quarantine, which puts them at high risk for virus transmission and subsequent poor health outcomes, our housing director collaborated with large scale homeless shelters to develop strategies that support social distancing and "stay at home" measures for these populations. Following the establishment of a targeted emergency fund, we encouraged all Ohio health plans to work with shelter systems to secure safe housing for COVID-positive residents and reduce the total number of residents in each setting. CareSource is also partnering with safe-recovery sites across the state and providing hygiene kits to local shelters that include sanitizer, masks and gloves.

DIRECT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE AND INVESTMENTS

Spearheaded effort to return hundreds of millions of dollars to the state

CareSource was the first MCP to commit to returning funds to the Ohio Department of Medicaid and led the charge amongst the state's plans which resulted in hundreds of millions being returned to the state's budget to help aid in COVID relief.



Partnered with Community Based Organizations (CBO) to address member needs

CareSource has invested more than \$500,000 in CBO partnerships across Ohio to support food security by partnering with food banks that provide meals to seniors and families.

Focused on stopping the spread in congregate settings

CareSource provided \$750,000 of funding to jump start permanent supportive housing programming in Franklin County to address the risks of COVID-19 spread in congregate settings including the local jail and homeless shelter system. The support will fund the FreshStart project to identify, engage and house CareSource members with elevated mortality risk for COVID-19 due to chronic behavioral and physical health needs who have had multiple interactions with jails and are experiencing housing instability. The program seeks to reduce reentry into congregate settings that place individuals and communities at risk for contraction and spread of COVID-19.

"I appreciate CareSource for this investment that will support vulnerable residents in our community. This program will help residents in meeting their basic health needs, while protecting the broader community from further spread of COVID-19. With CareSource's support, Franklin County is proud to partner on additional smart justice initiatives and ensure access to treatment and resources in the community."

*Marilyn Brown,
Franklin County Commissioner*

CareSource is collaborating with the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) to manage the two-year housing program and with the Franklin County Justice and Policy Programs to align with local resources for justice-involved individuals.

Addressed food insecurity for seniors

CareSource partnered with The Foodbank, Inc. on March 11 to ensure Dayton seniors were prepared as the pandemic started to unfold in our communities. We committed \$128,000 to prepare supplemental food boxes with a 14-day supply of food to be distributed to seniors who live with an income below 200% of the poverty line.

"There are many organizations across the country working to develop an approach to this issue. The partnership between CareSource and The Foodbank, Inc. in Dayton, Ohio is a shining example of innovation to ensure vulnerable neighbors have the food and supplies they need to feel safe and secure during these uncertain times"

*Kathryn Strickland, Chief Network Officer,
Feeding America*

Offered transportation in initiative for plasma donation

In an effort to remove barriers, CareSource extended our transportation benefit to include free rides for eligible members who volunteered to donate plasma in Ohio. This benefit was for a member who has fully recovered from a COVID-19 infection and met the American Red Cross eligibility requirements.

Supported small business with grants

Additionally, the CareSource Foundation awarded more than \$1.1 million in COVID-19 relief grants to support small business, community-based organizations, and health care organizations providing personal protective equipment. CareSource continues to invest in COVID-19 relief by supporting local businesses that are central to our members' communities. In collaboration with REOPEN Downtown Dayton, the CareSource Foundation has pledged \$500,000 in donations and generated interest for additional support. This partnership seeks to boost economic recovery due to the pandemic by offering small grants for operating costs and providing gap assistance to locally owned consumer businesses in downtown Dayton as they seek to resume operations within the new health guidelines. Among the businesses receiving aid from the partnership, 29.5% are minority-owned, and 49.1% are owned by women. REOPEN awards will assist businesses in keeping their doors open until their revenue sources revitalize.

Sponsored Stop the Spread Coalition

As one of the largest companies in the Dayton region CareSource saw an opportunity to be a part of the grassroots effort by Ohioans to fight a pandemic that's crippling our economy and wreaking havoc on our families. President and CEO of CareSource, Erhardt Preitauer, participated in the virtual press conference to launch Stop the Spread and we have asked employees to lead by example.



Provided grant to sustain specialized programs for women and children

CareSource gifted \$50,000 to the YWCA Dayton to support programming for women and children who reside in the domestic violence shelter amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The funds supported summer programming as children in shelter start their summer without traditional supports, such as day camps or childcare, face summer slide compounded by spring school closures, and navigate isolation while recovering from the trauma of abuse.

“This kind of gift is uncommon and unparalleled. We’re grateful for all gifts, but it is rare that a funder sees the fullness of our mission and chooses to support it without restriction. CareSource is setting the standard for what that looks like, and this generosity ensures that the safety needs of women and families in our community are treated holistically.”

Marshall Weil, director of development at the YWCA Dayton

CareSource will continue to work tirelessly with all our partners in the state of Ohio to take on challenges like COVID-19. Our commitment to Ohioans has been demonstrated over the course of three decades of innovation and leadership. And, while we’re proud of this legacy, 32 years later we remain vigilant and passionate about being an Ohio company improving the health and wellbeing of our fellow Ohioans.



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