

March 24, 2020

Scott P. Serota
President and Chief Executive Officer
Blue Cross Blue Shield Association
225 North Michigan Ave.
Chicago, IL 60601

120 South Riverside Plaza
Suite 2000
Chicago, Illinois 60606-6995
800.877.1600

1120 Connecticut Avenue NW
Suite 460
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Mr. Serota:

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (the “Academy”) supports the efforts of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association to safeguard the health of patients and health care providers during the coronavirus outbreak. Representing more than 107,000 registered dietitian nutritionists,¹ nutrition and dietetic technicians, registered, and advanced-degree nutritionists, the Academy is the largest association of nutrition and dietetic professionals in the United States. Our members provide medical and professional services in clinical and community settings, conduct significant research, and are committed to improving the health of all Americans through the transformative power of food and nutrition.

The COVID-19 outbreak presents a watershed moment in the delivery of health care in the United States. For years, the U.S. has been paying the price for overlooking the importance of nutrition, both in preventing and in treating costly chronic conditions. Now more than ever, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics believes it is vital to ensure everyone has timely, continuous access to safe, effective nutrition services that can improve their health and manage their chronic diseases.

Registered dietitian nutritionists are recognized by the National Academy of Medicine (formerly Institute of Medicine)² as the most qualified food and nutrition service providers. Studies show MNT provided by an RDN is linked to improved clinical outcomes and reduced costs related to physician’s time, medication use and hospital admissions for people with obesity, diabetes and disorders of lipid metabolism, as well as other chronic diseases.³

Removing limitations to the provision of telehealth services strengthens provider capacity and facilitates access to medically necessary patient care while avoiding the COVID-19 transmission risks associated with in-person care. The Academy urges the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association

¹ The Academy approved the optional use of the credential “registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN)” by “registered dietitians (RDs)” to more accurately convey who they are and what they do as the nation’s food and nutrition experts. The RD and RDN credentials have identical meanings and legal trademark definitions.

² Committee on Nutrition Services for Medicare Beneficiaries. “The Role of Nutrition in Maintaining Health in the Nation’s Elderly: Evaluating Coverage of Nutrition Services for the Medicare Population.” Washington, DC: Food and Nutrition Board, Institute of Medicine; January 1, 2000 (published).

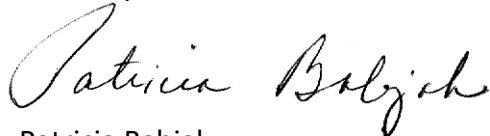
³ Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Evidence Analysis Library. *Medical Nutrition Therapy Evidence Analysis Project 2008*. <http://www.andevidencelibrary.com/mnt>.

to recommend that its franchises that are not already covering nutrition services provided via telehealth by registered dietitian nutritionists immediately remove these limitations. We also urge you to recommend that these parties strengthen capacity by expanding their RDN provider networks through expedited enrollment processes and by asking any third-party telehealth vendors to do the same.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer solutions that facilitate access to care and improve health during this national emergency. The Academy shares your belief that “patients need expanded access to telehealth to ensure expanded access to care.” We look forward to working with you to ensure that the health and well-being of the people we serve remain a top priority.

Please contact Marsha Schofield, the Academy’s senior director of governance and nutrition services coverage, at 312/899-1762 or mschofield@eatright.org with any questions or requests for additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patricia Babjak". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Patricia Babjak
Chief Executive Officer