



## COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

### MEMORANDUM

TO: Steve Walsh, Massachusetts Health and Hospital Association  
Dr. Tavi Diaz, Steward Health  
Lora Pellegrini, Massachusetts Association of Health Plans  
Sarah Iselin, Blue Cross Blue Shield MA  
Jim Brennan, Massachusetts Urgent Care Association

FROM: Kate Walsh, Secretary, Executive Office of Health and Human Services  
Dr. Robert Goldstein, Commissioner, Department of Public Health  
Kevin Beagan, Acting Commissioner, Division of Insurance  
Michael Levine, Assistant Secretary for MassHealth

RE: 90-day Urgent Care Strategy to Address Emergency Department Capacity

DATE: July 17, 2024

The Massachusetts healthcare system continues to face severe capacity challenges. Given the typically high emergency department (ED) volume in the summer and the increased ED volume many hospitals in eastern Massachusetts have experienced over the last few months, we are taking actions that can help redirect patients not needing emergency-level care to urgent care providers<sup>1</sup>. To that end, health plans and urgent care providers represented by the above-named entities have agreed to adopt the following temporary, 90-day flexibilities to increase emergency department capacity.

#### Health Plans

Beginning on July 3, 2024, and ending on October 1, 2024, Massachusetts insured health plans issued by insurance companies, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Massachusetts, and Health Maintenance Organizations (“Carriers”) will reimburse out-of-network urgent care centers in eastern Massachusetts as follows<sup>2</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> Urgent care providers are those locations that solely provide urgent care services during all hours of operations, whether licensed by DPH or operating as a provider owned and operated urgent care facility. Urgent care providers do not include locations that provide additional services to their patient panel that may include after-hours care or limited availability for walk-in care.

<sup>2</sup> For purposes of this memo, Eastern Massachusetts is defined to include the following counties: Essex, Middlesex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Bristol, Plymouth, Barnstable, Dukes, and Nantucket

- For services provided in urgent care centers with providers with whom the Carrier has a contract, but who do not participate in a member's health plan, unless a Carrier is otherwise directed by the Division of Insurance, Carriers will provide reimbursement for medically necessary urgent care services at the provider's contracted rate with the Carrier for delivered services.
- For services provided in urgent care centers with providers with whom a Carrier does not have any contract, unless a Carrier is otherwise directed by the Division of Insurance, Carriers will reimburse medically necessary urgent care services at a rate equal to 135 percent of the rate paid by Medicare for those services in the provider's geographic region.
- The MassHealth Program will issue a separate document that provides instructions for health plans contracting with the MassHealth program.

### **Urgent Care Providers**

From July 3, 2024 through October 1, 2024, urgent care centers in eastern Massachusetts will provide medically necessary urgent care services, including to out-of-network and MassHealth patients, with no balance billing to patients for any amount above the Carrier's reimbursement<sup>3</sup>.

To support this effort, the Department of Public Health, insurers, hospitals, and urgent care providers will ramp up their patient education efforts regarding appropriate use of EDs and urgent care centers.

Thank you for your collective efforts during these challenging times to support our healthcare system provide the right care at the right site for Massachusetts residents. Recognizing there is not a single answer to ease this situation, we are hopeful that this strategy will help reduce unnecessary emergency department crowding in the months ahead. We are grateful for your continued support.

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<sup>3</sup> This does not waive any applicable patient cost sharing, such as copays, included as part of the patient's insurance coverage, nor does it update urgent care provider policies regarding provision of care to uninsured individuals.