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## GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING YOUR OUT-OF-NETWORK HEALTH INSURANCE BENEFITS

Most health insurance companies contract with different medical and behavioral health providers in the community to create a network of preferred or covered providers. Depending on your insurance plan and its policies and regulations (each one is different and it can change from year to year), you may have what are called “out-of-network” benefits or coverage. This means that if you want to see a provider who is not in your insurance company’s network, there is still partial or total coverage available.

Because each health insurance plan is different, the best way to determine if you have out-of-network benefits is to call and speak with a benefits representative at your insurance company directly. The insurance company is also known as the “carrier.” The representative you speak with should be able to explain the details of your plan, as well as provide you with necessary instructions to use your benefits.

Below are steps to take in order to understand how to utilize your out-of-network behavioral health benefits. I encourage you to be prepared to take notes during the phone call. Documenting the date, representative’s name (and ID number) as well as the confirmation number (if applicable) will also be helpful in case you need to have a follow-up phone conversation, make an appeal, or challenge a claim.

Sometimes there are different carriers for behavioral health and medical care existing under one insurance plan. For example, Harvard Pilgrim could manage your medical benefits while United Behavioral Health could oversee your behavioral or mental health benefits. Refer to the back of your insurance card to obtain the name and number of your behavioral health carrier. You will find contact information on your card. Please keep in mind that you may have to call to confirm the carrier if your insurance card does not show it.

Ask the benefits representative to explain what your out-of-network benefits are. Is there a deductible or an annual visit maximum amount? They may ask for information about my location, my

discipline, and other identifying information (such as my Tax ID and National Provider Identification Number). They may also need to clarify your data such as your plan number, so keep your card near you.

Ask the representative to confirm the requirements to use out-of-network benefits. For example, they may insist you pay the full fee out-of-pocket initially, and then submit a completed Health Insurance Claim Form. If this is the case, I will help you with the paperwork. In this case, you would receive the reimbursement check directly. It's also important to confirm the processing time once a claim form or invoice is submitted, so you can plan accordingly. If your plan is an HMO (Health Maintenance Organization), they may have more in-depth requirements to go outside of the network and may want to pay me directly. Again, each plan is different. Take detailed notes, don't hesitate to ask clarifying questions, and feel free to contact me for help.

Once you understand your benefit options and how to use them, we will have a conversation so that I can help you meet all the requirements. In some cases, this may mean that I will need to interact with the insurance company on your behalf, with your signed consent. I'm happy to help you navigate this fairly simple process, so let me know if questions arise.