

Let's lead on how Washington workers manage their health

by **Tim Lieb**

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The Puget Sound Region has long had one of the strongest economies in the country, buoyed by innovation, adaptability and an entrepreneurial spirit. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, some of our area's largest companies were the first in the U.S. to move to a remote workforce, and many smaller businesses pivoted their business models to meet their customers' changing needs.

Meanwhile, Washington's health challenges only grow as we enter the colder months. Mental health providers are seeing a rush of patients as the pandemic wears on; the state Department of Health estimates that 30-60 percent of Washington residents will experience depression as a result of the pandemic.

As employers, it's more critical than ever that we evolve to serve the increasingly complex health needs of Washingtonians. We can do this by harnessing technology and innovation. At Regence BlueShield, our health plan members have increased their use of telehealth by 5,000 percent since the pandemic. That's a great start, but we need to do more to ensure that we're delivering better, simpler and more affordable care to our families, neighbors and employees.

Giving people control of their health

Every day I talk with employers about their health care experiences, and I hear a recurring theme: their current experience is too fractioned, complex and impersonal. Business leaders and employees alike don't want multiple health apps and online portals, with numerous passwords and user interfaces. We've been down that road before, and it results in low engagement and wasted benefit dollars.

What if there was an all-encompassing solution, complete with an experienced guide, that could help employees navigate their health care path? Here's a story about how a Regence member, Sam, needed help with a common question on medical costs.

Advocating for patients

Recently, Sam needed an MRI. To better understand the costs covered by his health insurance, he turned to a new health care solution called Journi. He was instantly connected to a health care specialist – a Journi Care Guide – who is trained to be the member's advocate and health care navigator.

Sam's Care Guide called his health plan with him on the line to confirm the MRI would be in-network, find out his current deductible balance, and get an estimate for the procedure. All of the information was also emailed to Sam after the call. After the MRI, his Care Guide followed up to see how the appointment went and if he needed further assistance. Comforted by his Care Guide's genuine interest in his health, Sam felt supported when he needed it most.

That's the value that Journi offers to employers, helping them support employees in getting the care they need, however they need it.

Journi meets people where they are at, from scheduling a check-up and understanding medical bills to sorting through complex care options and seeking second opinions. Most people use Journi through their phone, and with a single sign-in and password, they can access and control their care through an easy-to-use platform.

This simple, one-stop shop for health care means that employees are more engaged in their health, which leads to a more productive workforce and reduced health care costs. As we come to the close of a difficult year, Journi is the kind of innovation our state needs to improve the health of Washingtonians – and maximize the power of employers' health care dollars – long after the pandemic is over.



Tim Lieb is President of Regence BlueShield in Washington. Immersed in the health care industry for more than 20 years, he takes an inside-out approach to working with employers that starts with understanding their unique needs and then creating solutions that help drive growth and support company culture. Journi is a separate and independent company that provides health and technology coordination services; it does not provide Blue Shield products or services. Journi is a strategic partner of Regence. Employers interested in learning more can visit [journi.com](https://www.journi.com).



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