

Traditionally, health plans have sought to manage the growing costs of healthcare for members by managing chronic and acute conditions and implementing wellness programs. While these offerings may achieve participation and results in the beginning, they rarely lead to sustainable health improvement.

In April 2021, Newtopia conducted a focus group with innovative leaders from multiple health plans to get their opinions and suggestions on the best way to create long-lasting health improvements among their members. The subject of habit change was front and center, and the information gleaned was revealing. The following are key insights and takeaways.

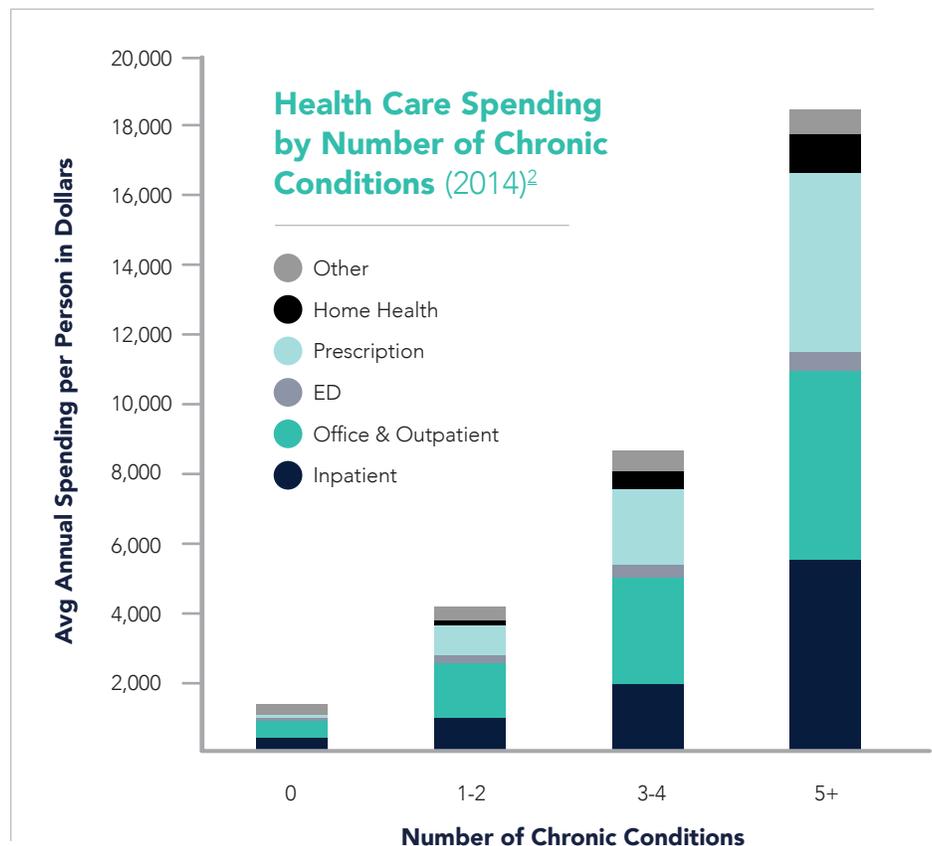
1. Health plans are seeking more effective ways to reduce cost of care for members with chronic diseases.

Ninety percent of our nation’s \$3.8 trillion in annual healthcare costs are attributable to people with chronic and mental health conditions.¹ While you would think this would be the primary focus of the provider community, the reality is that care delivery is still reactive, episodic, and disconnected. The shortcomings of this approach impact patients, payers, and providers alike.

COST OF CHRONIC DISEASE

2. Health plans believe that better health outcomes require long-term habit change.

Several of the leaders we spoke with understand that long-term change in health requires long-term change in habits. But as of now, they’ve not found an effective program that delivers optimal results. Some pointed to incentives as being pseudo-effective, saying they work for only a short period of time. One leader felt that “incentives are a



quick fix but zap you of altruistic decisions.” Others said incentives can be a good way to get members engaged but they aren’t sustainable; they lose their effectiveness in keeping members motivated. In other words, incentives alone fall short of delivering long-term change.

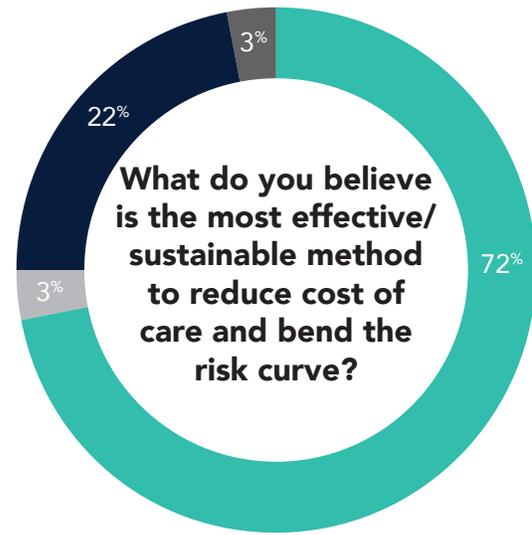
One leader described how their organization hoped machine learning was going to be the answer to improve engagement and member communications. Then they realized they didn’t have as much data as they thought they did, which renders machine learning less impactful than it could be.

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN BEHAVIORS AND NEGATIVE OUTCOMES

3. Health plans say the key to a successful habit change is personalization that focuses on the whole person.

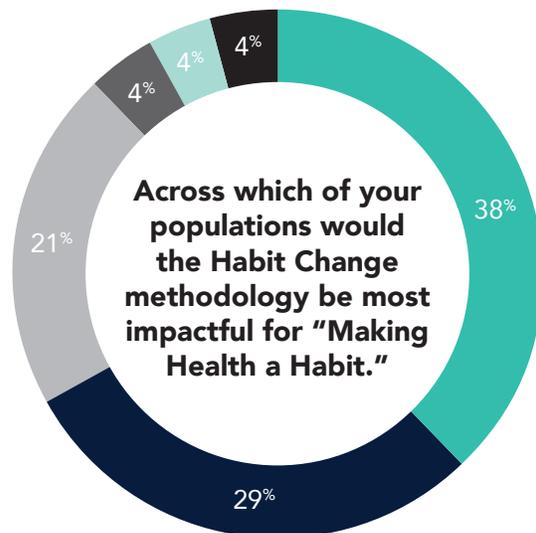
Another challenge that health plan leaders highlighted was the inability to create a personalized program at scale. “What makes each person change is unique to them,” one leader said. “You have to start where the person is now and then customize to what’s specific to them.” This sentiment was consistent among other attendees. Habit change has to be customized to the individual’s unique situation; one-size-fits-all programs don’t work. An example given was around income and the ability to afford healthy food. “Even if a person has the will to eat well, they may not be able to afford nutritious food.” Programs need to be able to shift accommodate the unique needs of members.

Focus Group Perspective on How to Reduce of Cost of Care and Bend the Risk Curve



- Sustainable Behavior Change
- Incentivizing Desired Actions
- Medication Adherence
- None of the Above

Focus Group Perspective on How to Implement Habit Change



- Preventing, reversing, or slowing the progression of chronic disease (for those at risk)
- Integrated with existing disease management and case management departments
- Total population, regardless of risk factors
- Integrate into focused initiatives for women's health, LGBTQ+, health equity, aging, etc.
- Positioned to existing diagnosed mental health cohorts who have an out-of-range BMI (mental and physical health)
- Supporting innovation initiatives

RECOMMENDATIONS TO MAKE HABIT CHANGE PERSONAL

Participants in the focus group discussed the ways health plans can make habit change personal when working with members to improve health. The following are some of the recommendations:

- » Engage the member and their specific goals, social determinants of health and support networks
- » Include all factors that impact a person's health journey – the mental, physical, and emotional aspects of a person, as well as economic situation
- » Leverage technology, videos, and online tools to drive engagement
- » Incentives can help but aren't enough
- » Education needs to be part of the equation

“The true success is delivering personalization throughout the journey and starting where they are.”

- Focus group participant

HOW A WHOLE-PERSON, HYPER-PERSONALIZED PROGRAM WORKS

Achieving long-term health improvements requires a whole-person approach, one that includes every aspect of a person's life and focuses on the small steps and their daily choices to prevent, reverse, and slow the progression of chronic disease.

Newtopia has found a winning formula that includes all the issues the focus group participants highlighted. Our one-size-fits-one habit change program is customized to each participant's unique health risks, genetics, medical history, motivation, social determinants of health, personal preferences, and goals. Participants are paired with an Inspirator, a world-class expert trained in the fields of nutrition, exercise, and behavioral science. Inspirators and participants are matched together based on each one's personality profile.

Nationwide Weight Gain During COVID Pandemic³

42% of adults in the U.S. gained weight during the pandemic.

29 pounds was the average amount gained

10% of adults in the US gained more than 50 pounds

Weight Loss Among Newtopia Participants During COVID Pandemic

77% of participants lost weight.

44% of those who lost weight lost a minimum of 4.3% body weight.

22% of those who lost weight dropped a full BMI category.

WEIGHT LOSS AMONG NEWTOPIA PARTICIPANTS DURING THE COVID PANDEMIC

Newtopia participants who achieved such positive results were no different from anyone else. They all were impacted by the pandemic and were exposed to the same stressors. What made them so successful? The answer is Newtopia’s personalized approach to habit change.

HYPER-PERSONALIZED HABIT CHANGE PROGRAM

As one of our focus group participants said, “Behavior change is very challenging; it’s how you do it that is going to be the driver for how health outcomes improve.” The answer to the “how” is personalization. Members have done the best they could with what they’ve been given thus far. Now we know there’s a better way.

Sources

1. [“Health and Economic Costs of Chronic Disease,” Centers for Disease Control](#)
2. [“Widespread Misunderstandings About Chronic Disease and the Reality,” World Health Organization](#)
3. <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2021/03/one-year-pandemic-stress>

Thank you to all the benefits leaders who shared their feedback for this survey:

