

Optum Idaho manages outpatient behavioral health benefits for Idaho Medicaid members. It is our commitment to help transform Idaho's behavioral health outpatient system by focusing on helping people reach recovery in their own health journey, one person, one family, one community at a time.

2022 Spring Issue



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Professional Runner Allie Ostrander

A Conversation with Optum Idaho About Mental Health and Eating Disorders

Editor's Note: *Runner, coach, YouTube star and mental health advocate, Allie Ostrander grew up in Alaska, where she developed a love for sports and the great outdoors. Her passion? Running. Since grade school, Allie would take immense*

pride in beating all the boys in the mile during gym class and was able to carry this passion through college, where she competed in track and cross country at Boise State University and upon graduation, she was offered a professional contract

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Resources For You

Optum Member Access & Crisis Line

(Available 24/7)

1-855-202-0973

For TDD/TTY, dial **711**

Learn What Behavioral Health Services are Available to You

Visit optumidaho.com

Click the "Resources & Tools" link listed under the Member Quick Links section on the left side of the page. Next, click the grey box titled "Quick Reference Guide to Services Available."

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(for TDD/TTY, dial **711**)
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Professional Runner (continued from page 1)



from Brooks Beasts Track Club. Allie currently coaches at Seattle Pacific University.

She spoke recently with Optum Idaho's Member Matters about her love of running and the pressure she felt to maintain a lean physique. What began as an effort to maximize her running performance grew and morphed into a serious eating disorder (ED) that ultimately left her body incapable of handling the rigorous training load required of professional running. As a result, she took a break from competitive running in early 2022 as she realized that she wouldn't be able to achieve her goals until her mind and body were stronger.

Member Matters (MM): Allie, thank you for sharing your time and story with Optum Idaho Members. We applaud your passion and drive in helping to raise awareness of mental health and eating disorders. What do you wish more people knew about eating disorders?

Allie: I think there is a common misconception that everyone with an eating disorder looks a certain way, fears all foods and has no muscle or strength, but that is not true. Eating disorders are a mental

illness, that can have a serious physical impact. However, too many EDs go unnoticed because people are told there is no issue if they aren't a certain size. Another example of a harmful stereotype is the difference in fears. Some people with EDs may be scared to eat bread while others may be terrified to eat breakfast and others never skip a meal. These differences don't make one more valid than the other, they just demonstrate the wide spectrum of ED experiences and how the diagnosis and treatment of these disorders needs to improve.

MM: How much did you know about eating disorders before being diagnosed with one yourself?

Allie: I think I fell prey to many of the stereotypes I just listed. I always justified what I was doing, saying that it was "optimizing my nutrition for training" and told myself that there wasn't a problem because I didn't look as thin as the photos depicting EDs in my health textbook. I convinced myself again and again that I was fine because I was still eating, I was still strong enough to run, and I was able to focus and perform well in school. Now, I realize that I knew so little about the

continual damage that I was doing to my body by not providing it with adequate energy.

MM: How has being a runner affected your eating disorder or recovery experience?

Allie: Being a runner impacts my recovery in many ways. It makes it harder because I feel a lot of pressure to be lean for my sport. It's impossible to deny that body composition has an impact on performance, and that was a fixation for me over the years. Now, I am starting to challenge that narrative and remind myself that, while body composition is important, being lean is useless without the consistent rigorous training necessary to build fitness. If I'm not eating enough, none of that training is possible because my body breaks down (fatigue, lack of adaptation, injury, illness, etc.). So, in that way, running makes recovery easier: I can see the ways that more food can improve my performance in workouts and recovery which provides needed positive reinforcement.

MM: Why did you decide to seek help and recover, and what surprised you most about the process of recovery?

Allie: Between April 2020 and June 2021, I had five different serious



injuries that required extended time-off for each. This was devastating and difficult, but it also forced me to face the reality that what I was doing was unsustainable and unhealthy. I had tried to pursue recovery earlier in my career, but I never felt a sense of urgency. These injuries made me take recovery more seriously and consider it an important part of my training. What surprised me the most was the sense of community that came with recovery. While it wasn't fun, it was incredible to be able to commiserate, bond and connect with other people going through something similar. That included people in the same treatment center as me and the tens of thousands of people that I reached online, who provided support, shared stories or asked for help or advice. I think it's beautiful that something so difficult has also brought me such a sense of community.

MM: What resources have you found helpful and/or supported your recovery, and what do you do today that helps you maintain a protect your recovery?

Allie: I continue to work with a therapist and registered dietitian who both specialize in eating disorders. They are instrumental in holding me accountable and helping me through recovery. Being open about my struggles and my efforts to overcome them holds me accountable to my goals. In addition, opening up to the people who I am close to (family, significant other, friends, roommates, etc.) makes it harder for me to hide when I am struggling and helps those people help me.

MM: Many young girls and women struggle with societal pressures to be thin or look a certain way. What advice would you give to your 13-year-old self?

Allie: I would tell her to trust in her ability and know that giving her body the energy that it needs won't hold her back from her goals but enable her to be strong enough to chase them. I would also make sure that she realized the extreme risks that she was taking by going down the path of ignoring hunger cues, restricting what/how much she was eating, criticizing everything about her body, judging her ability and worth based on size and limiting her life experience based on the need for control. This already sounds horrible, but it also comes with a plethora of side effects including reduced bone density, amenorrhea, a damaged metabolism, underactive thyroid, decreased sleep quality, body dysmorphia, emotional suppression, depression, anxiety, a binge/restrict cycle and so many more. I'm not saying that I've experienced all these symptoms, but they are all SO COMMON in the eating disorder space. When I first started having restrictive thoughts and behaviors around food, I never considered the cascading effect of those actions. These side effects are the long-term impacts of eating disorders that people don't see.

MM: What words of hope would you give to those currently struggling?

Allie: I would just say that it's great that they are making the effort now. However hard recovery feels, it would be harder if they had waited any longer. It's great that they decided to take ownership of their life and pursue freedom from an eating disorder. It isn't going to be fun, but it is going to be the most important thing they ever do for their physical and mental health.

Allie shares her ED recovery journey, eating tips, goal-setting and fitness regimen on her YouTube channel, which you can watch by searching for "Allie Ostrander" on [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com). ■

The Importance of Being an LGBTQ+ Ally

By Optum Idaho Behavioral Medical Director Julie Wood M.D.

We reported in February that Idaho has approximately 48,000 Idahoans age 13 and up that identify as LGBTQ+. We also shared some staggering statistics related to the discrimination many of these individuals face. Do you know someone personally that has depression, trauma, substance use and/or suicidal ideation due to their experience with bullying, direct violence or discrimination by a healthcare professional? Even if you have just heard stories about these types of occurrences, we want to encourage you to take the opportunity to learn more and understand how your support can make a big difference and possibly save a life. You may be a friend, a family member, a neighbor or a colleague to someone that's a part of the LGBTQ+ community and want to understand more, but are afraid to ask questions or don't know where to find information about being a support to those you know that identify as LGBTQ+. If so, there are several resources listed below to help guide you and address some of the questions you may have.

A specific organization to highlight is PFLAG, Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. PFLAG was the first national support organization and was developed to support gay and lesbian people in 1973 after a mother publicly walked beside her gay son. Her public support was applauded by many and created a lot of curiosity and interest. Her love and courage to stand up publicly in a time much less tolerant than today has now grown into the largest national support organization with over 400 chapters. PFLAG offers many programs including *Straight for Equality and Cultivating Respect: Safe Schools for All*. These are only



few of the many resources to help you step up and speak out.

First, let's start by defining what it means to be an ally. According to ReachOut.com, an ally is someone who stands up for, supports and encourages the people around them. The term, ally, is not synonymous to the LGBTQ+ community, but it is frequently used by those that want to develop understanding and build knowledge about those that identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, pansexual or asexual.

There are some basic things you can do to build your knowledge and comfort level. The following are a few tips to consider:

Listen: Avoid assumptions.

Educate yourself: Don't confuse gender and sexual orientation.

Ask yourself: Do I understand and use the appropriate terminology?

Stay informed: Ask questions but be respectful.

Use preferred pronouns and chosen name: But be mindful about the person's desire to maintain their decision to share with others and perhaps come out with some and not others in their lives.

Be visible and proactive: Support and participate in LGBTQ+ charities and events.

If you are unsure what questions are appropriate, what questions may be considered disrespectful or recognize you aren't familiar with the terminology used regarding LGBTQ+ topics but are interested in learning more, we've included additional resources for you to explore and become an ally:

- www.Pride365plus.com
- www.thetrevorproject.org
- www.pflag.org
- www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/youth-resources.htm
- www.hrc.org/resources/being-an-lgbtq-ally ■

Building a Partnership with Your Child's Care Team

By Optum Idaho Recovery & Resiliency Manager Julie Hardle



All children and youth with emotional, behavioral and mental health challenges should have access to the support and services they need to be successful at home and at school. The decision to seek mental health support for your child can be painful and overwhelming. Whether you're just beginning that journey or you've been accessing services and support for several years, a little extra guidance from understanding and experienced fellow parents can be helpful.

There are many things you can do to support your loved one and maintain you and your family's well-being. Working together with the care team is in the best interest of your child. As a parent/primary caregiver, you are the expert on your family. You provide a perspective that is critical to the care team and your involvement is necessary every step of the way. Learning how to advocate for you and your child is vitally important and will empower you to feel like your concerns are being addressed and questions are being answered. Building a partnership with professionals with

mutual communication, cooperation and responsibility will assist in the achievement of your family goals related to your child's treatment.

The demand of parenting is stressful. This can be especially true for parents who feel isolated, do not have a solid support system in place or who are experiencing other major stress factors, including a recent move, financial worries or physical health concerns. Sometimes stress and feeling overwhelmed are signs that you are trying to do too much. Paying attention to your self-care will help you find the right balance you and your family need. For instance, scheduling needed breaks from your children helps you recharge your batteries. Many parents find as little as 15 minutes consistently taken make a big difference. One tool that many parents find helpful to learn about and prioritize their self-care is an app called Sanvello. Optum Idaho members have free access to the premium version. You can learn more at [sanvello.com](https://www.sanvello.com) and download the app at the Apple App Store or Google Play.

Remember you are not alone. Parent-to-parent support is a unique and valuable enhancement to children's mental health services. Sometimes the best support comes from those who have "been there, done that," and being supported by someone with similar lived expertise is valuable in helping parents to feel understood, less alone, more hopeful and encouraged that they too can successfully navigate the mental health services that touch their family and successfully meet their child's mental health needs

Below are some resources that can assist you in building a partnership with your child's treatment team. You can also find these resource links at [optumidaho.com](https://www.optumidaho.com) under the Member Resources and Tools webpage.

Parent-Professional Partnership

Tip Sheet: www.acmh-mi.org/get-help/collaborating-with-the-professionals-working-with-my-family/parent-professional-partnership-tip-sheet/

Learn How to Collaborate with the Professionals Who are Working with Your Family:

www.acmh-mi.org/get-help/collaborating-with-the-professionals-working-with-my-family/

Idaho Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health – Parent Resources:

www.fyidaho.org/resources/parent-resource

NAMI-Family to Family Support: namiidaho.org/support-and-education/mental-health-education/

YES Family Workbook:

yes.idaho.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/YESFamilyWorkbook.pdf ■



Knowledge is Power: Tips for Foster Families

By Optum Idaho Sr. Business Process Analyst & Foster Parent Zachary Stahl

The saying goes, “knowledge is power.” Unfortunately, as foster parents, knowledge can also be rare. Many times as a foster parent, I’ve received a call about a child in need and all the knowledge I’m provided is a gender and age—and a name, if I’m lucky. We foster parents don’t mind too much. If we weren’t flexible by nature, we wouldn’t have signed up to do what we do. However, I sincerely believe the knowledge-is-power saying, and I hope to share some knowledge today to empower my fellow foster parents with tips from an “insider” when it comes to your foster child’s Medicaid mental health benefits.

Tip 1: You can receive respite through Medicaid. Through the YES Program, you can get up to 300 hours per year of respite care provided by trained professionals

for your foster child. Call Liberty Healthcare to schedule an assessment to see if the child qualifies, then go to **optumidaho.com** to find a respite provider.

Tip 2: You do not need a referral to get into counseling. There are no hoops to jump through to get a child into counseling. Go to **optumidaho.com** and click “Find a Provider” on the left. You can even filter your search results by expertise such as “abuse & trauma”, by provider gender, by age group treated and even for specific services like “youth peer support.”

Tip 3: There is a 24/7 member access and crisis line. Optum offers a Member Access and Crisis Line (**1-855-202-0973**) for members, which is available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, including

holidays and weekends, to discuss urgent and emergency situations and to provide telephonic support and connection to resources. Save this number in your phone today.

Tip 4: Optum Idaho has a Transition-Aged Youth guide. This guide is available on the member page on **optumidaho.com** and is targeted to Medicaid members (which includes foster children) that are in the 17-18 age group. The TAY guide provides practical guidance to members transitioning from child care to adult care so they can more easily navigate the Medicaid system of care during this critical time in their lives. ■

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If you think you weren’t treated fairly because of your sex, age, race, color, national origin or disability, you can send a complaint to:

Optum Civil Rights Coordinator
11000 Optum Circle
Eden Prairie, MN 55344

Phone: **888-445-8745**, TTY **711**
Fax: 855-351-5495
Email: optum_civil_rights@optum.com

If you need help with your complaint, please call the toll-free number **(855) 202-0973**. TTY **711**. You must send the complaint within 60 days of when you found out about the issue.

You can file a complaint with the US Department of Health and Human Services.

Online: <https://ocrportal.hhs.gov/ocr/portal/lobby.jsf>

Complaint forms are available at <https://www.hhs.gov/ocr/complaints/index.html>

Phone: Toll-free **1-800-368-1019**. TTD **800-537-7697**.

Mail: U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services
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SW Room 509F, HHH Building
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