

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 Fall Issue



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A Veteran's Story of Strength and Resilience

A Conversation with Optum Idaho About Recovery, Strength and Resilience

Editor's Note: A native Idahoan, Tyson Hawkins served two tours of duty overseas, both in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. He is an individual living in recovery from mental health illness and substance use disorder, with nearly six years of wellness in sobriety. Tyson is a

Peer Navigator for Optum Idaho's Recovery and Resiliency team and a Certified Peer Support Specialist, Peer Recovery Coach and Youth Support Provider. Optum Peer Navigators are certified peer support specialists who possess a positive and sustained lived

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Editor: Rebecca Kuta, Optum Idaho Member Engagement & Internal Communications Manager



Resources For You

Optum Member Access & Crisis Line

(Available 24/7)

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For TDD/TTY, dial **711**

Learn What Behavioral Health Services are Available to You

Visit optumidaho.com

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Call **1-855-202-0973**
(for TDD/TTY, dial **711**)
to start the process.

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A Veteran's Story (Continued from page 1)

experience with recovery and wellness from mental health illness and/or co-occurring substance use disorder. They provide a positive role-model to others who are seeking to engage with a recovery of their own by creating deep connections and relationships with these individuals through shared experience and empathetic listening. This relationship provides the framework for a peer navigator to support an individual as they work to identify their needs, set goals and come up with a plan on how to achieve them.

He spoke recently with Optum Idaho's Member Matters about his personal recovery journey as a veteran of the Iraq War and his hope of helping others know that help is available, and recovery is possible.

Member Matters (MM): Tyson, thank you for sharing your time and story with Optum Idaho Members. You've dedicated much of your time to raising awareness of mental illness, substance-use and depression from a veteran's perspective, and we applaud you! We are interested in learning more about your story, what gave you the strength to recover and how you cope today.

Tyson: When I came home from the service, I really struggled to adjust to civilian life and putting my military experiences behind me. There was so much trauma associated with my tours overseas and discharge, and I found myself quickly turning to alcohol and other substances to cope. My undiagnosed and untreated mental health illness rapidly and completely began to take control of my life. I felt isolated and disconnected to the people around me, even with those I loved the most and felt the closest to.

I was struggling with depression at times, anxiety at others. I struggled to feel safe in certain environments... and I obsessed over the safety and well-being of those around me. I fought with sleep constantly, often unable to fall asleep and experiencing nightmares when I did. Sleep was my escape when I could get it. For years this was my existence. I was unwell. I

was lost, sad, lonely and increasingly dependent on substances to function poorly on a daily basis. My addictions grew. I alienated everyone who mattered. I found myself homeless and living on the streets. At my worst, I didn't want to live anymore, and I believed my loved ones would be better off without me.

Thankfully, my actions and behaviors ran me afoul of the law. While awaiting legal resolution on my criminal cases, I was approached while in-custody with an opportunity to participate in a treatment program specifically for veteran offenders. I was wary, but ultimately agreed and was accepted into the Ada County Veterans Treatment Court. As a participant in the court program, I was gifted the opportunity to receive substance use and mental health treatment. It saved my life. Not only that, but I also learned a new way to live that made living it worthwhile. Joy, purpose, belonging and hope have replaced the emotions from before, and I could not be more grateful to have found this new way of life. Now, I just desperately want others to find what I've found in recovery and help them find it if they need it.

MM: Throughout history, service members have been placed in unimaginable situations, often situations in which they must make difficult decisions. What do you wish more people knew about veterans?

Tyson: I think it would be helpful if more people were accepting of the fact that it's unlikely that they'll ever be able to understand a veteran's experience. And that we don't expect you to. Sincere and genuine empathy goes a long way, and you don't have to necessarily experience combat firsthand in order to be capable of an empathetic response toward another person who has. As our trauma can be unique, it can isolate us because we know that we aren't relatable.

When we come home, it's almost always without any of the best friends we've ever made. We've left our

friends in our old units, or they've left us for their hometowns across the country. For some of us, our best friend never made it back. The depth of these relationships makes it hard to experience shallow relationships or even see them as valuable. It turns out what we need is each other and an authentic, caring person who truly seeks to accept and love, instead of trying to understand and fix. This can play a significant role in a veteran's wellness battle.

Also, purpose. Veterans need purpose as if it were oxygen. One of the hardest parts of the transition for me post-military was trying to reconcile having gone from liberating a nation from a tyrannical dictator, to taking food orders at a restaurant. I went from fighting in the Global War on Terrorism—to a serving job at Chili's. There's nothing wrong with waiting tables, but it was wrong for me. What we do next needs to MATTER. We need to find our purpose, fueled by passion, or we will continue to struggle with an ever-deepening sense of dissatisfaction.

MM: Are there military- and veteran-specific programs for mental health and substance abuse?

Tyson: Yes. Veterans Affairs generally has some really terrific programs for both. Veterans Affairs is not always available to every veteran, though, so I would encourage veterans seeking help that may not be eligible for Veterans Affairs services to seek out other veteran-specific programs or organizations that will offer supportive services and treatment. Unfortunately, they don't come find you.

You must be proactive and reach out and ask for help. You'll need to get to work. You've got to do research, apply and fill out paperwork, and wait...on long lists. You'll get plenty of no's, and yet you must persevere. They don't give anything away. You'll have to earn everything you get. Embrace any support you can get. Case Managers and Peer Specialists are excellent

resources to lean on. In the end, it'll all be so worth it.

MM: Why did you decide to seek help and recover?

Tyson: At first, I was compelled by law enforcement and the criminal justice system. Soon after, I came to recognize why I wanted to recover...for my children, my family and my friends. Eventually, I was able to see how my experiences and ability to connect with others made me uniquely suited to help and support others through their own struggles...so it also became about helping others. Finally, I came to love myself and realized that I wanted to live this way for myself, and my future, and for my own personal joy and fulfillment the remainder of my life.

MM: What surprised you most about the process of recovery?

Tyson: A big part of my treatment was educational, and I was surprised often as I came to learn about the science and medical data surrounding substance use, mental health and co-occurring disorder. There is widely available scientific data and studies regarding addiction and physiological explanations on how and why chemical dependencies occur.

What I learned was that addiction is a bona fide, legitimate illness of the mind and body, and there are many effective approaches to treatment that can help. I was surprised to learn that I was sick, and that my sickness was fairly common, and the symptoms of it could explain a lot of my thoughts, feelings and actions. I was surprised to learn that recovery was possible even for me, and, in that possibility, I found hope for the first time in a long time.

MM: What are some good, effective treatment protocols to help people break that cycle of mental health and substance use disorders, and what resources have you found helpful/and or supported your recovery?

Tyson: It may sound cliché, but I found the most effective treatment

in my own recovery to be consistent traditional counseling, talk therapy and participation in group sessions. Going to counseling and processing my past (trauma, guilt, shame, anger, failure, etc.) allowed me to break free from its bondage. Sitting in groups and sharing experiences with people in a safe and supportive environment helped me come to realize that I was not as particularly unique in my struggle as I had believed. It helped me move beyond my isolation and to understand that there are a lot of people like me, and that all of us deserve a path to happiness.

MM: What do you do today that helps you maintain or protect your recovery?

Tyson: There are so many things I do consistently to maintain my recovery, but I believe the biggest things are staying positive, hopeful and optimistic...and being radically grateful for this new way of living and everything it has afforded me. Taking time to be present keeps my focus on what I built around me, what is important to me and why I am choosing to live my life this way.

Being mindful of my blessings keeps me motivated and focused on what I need to keep doing as I work toward accomplishing the next goals I have set for myself. Finally, and maybe most importantly, I seek out and strive to maintain meaningful relationships and healthy connections with people. I hold deeply the belief that human connection is the primary driving force behind recovery.

MM: What advice would you give to other veterans?

Tyson: Probably the most important thing would be to find your tribe. Find your new unit, your battle buddies, some collection of people you can relate to and can be there to support you as you navigate the work of processing your experiences...should you choose to. Find and engage in the available veteran's groups and form relationships with our fellow brothers

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Peer Support Brings Hope During Challenging Struggles

By Julie Hardle, Optum Idaho Recovery & Resiliency Manager

Recently, a co-worker and I were talking about the perfect time to introduce peer support services to members that are struggling with inpatient hospitalizations. We share the experience of more than one mental health crisis and spending hours in an emergency room. Both of us went from the emergency room to staying in the hospital.

We are both now living a life of recovery with purpose and meaning that goes beyond what we dreamed was possible all those years ago. We are also certified peer support specialists and peer recovery coaches that work at Optum Idaho.

Many find themselves in similar situations because of an attempt on their life, an overdose, or severe mania and psychosis. The wounds from those experiences are deep. We agreed those experiences hung like a dark, thick, cold-lingering fog of shame that is felt deep in your soul and heart. The shame you feel takes away your confidence and self-respect. After those experiences, because of the stigma around mental illness and substance use disorder, the despair of shame would set in.

We were filled with HOPE and light, through the support of peers that were part of a community of others carving out a life of recovery. The peer support specialists and recovery coaches we worked with modeled making the next right choice, one step, one day at a time. The occasional setbacks were chances for reflection, new awareness and growth. Meeting and interacting with other peers



introduced us to a vibrant and inspiring community that gave us both a home, a social support network and sometimes a needed safety net.

While we agree that sometimes psychiatric emergencies call for inpatient hospitalization, they can be jarring. Comparatively, while circumstances were different, the experiences and emotional states were similar.

We were scared, confused, the circumstances of our conditions hitting with such force that there was further disorientation and panic. That sometimes presented as agitation and combativeness. Often that was

met with punitive measures that validated our perceived lack of security and safety.

We pondered together how it would have been to have access to peer support in those moments. One person to say, “Hey, I am here. I know what this feels like, and I understand why you are so afraid. You are not alone, “what would feel like support to you right now?” Compassion, understanding, empathy and a reassuring calm. The bond of trust that is forged quickly through a desperate need and more importantly, a reassuring “knowing” that comes from a shared experience makes all the differences.

Need crisis help or someone to talk to?

You can call, text or chat with the national/Idaho Suicide Prevention line at **988** or **988lifeline.org**. Or call the Optum Idaho Member Access & Crisis line at **1-855-202-0973** (TTY: **711**), available 24/7.

Family Involvement is Vital in the Treatment of a Child with Mental Illness

By Beth Markley, NAMI Idaho Executive Director



Our son was 15 when he approached us about wanting help for his anxiety. We had so many questions. Did he need a psychiatrist or a counselor? Would he need medication? Did we want that? What caused this?

We considered ourselves experienced and involved parents, but with each question that came up, the uncertainty and self-blame grew. We had so much to learn about finding help, what to expect of the recovery process, or what to do if there's a crisis. Our doubt and shame could have made it difficult to agree on anything while caring for ourselves and the rest of our family, possibly impacting his recovery.

Over the course of our journey, we've encountered a wide variety of doctors and therapists, visiting several before we found a good fit for our son. After that, with time and persistence, we gained an understanding of our role in his recovery. We read everything we could find, joined workshops, and found support groups and therapy of our own. All of this helped us feel less

alone in our struggle, gave us hope, and helped shake off the sense of isolation and shame.

We now realize a good first step in this process would have been to rigorously question his therapists, not about what caused his illness or what he was supposed to do, but about our role, what to expect, and what resources might there be for us to help him and ourselves.

As parent, you play an important role in your child's recovery. Give yourself time to figure things out. Join a support group—your local NAMI (www.namiidaho.org) should have in person and remote options—you'll gain support from others going through similar issues. Educate yourself. Make it your mission to learn everything you can about treatment options, self-care and advocacy.

There are no easy answers, but there is reason for optimism. It won't be long before you can be a help to others in the same position, and that can be empowering and healing as well. ■

Veteran *(Continued from page 3)*

and sisters. Offer your own support to them and reach out when you need to. Have their "6," and they'll have yours.

I think it's important for us to come to a place mentally and emotionally, to be willing to close that chapter of our lives and move into the next: A chapter where our veteran status and military service can be not who we are, but an important part of who we are.

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

Tyson: I would tell them that they are not as alone as it feels like they are. I would say to not give up, keep fighting and the only way to fail is to quit. I would encourage them to muster up whatever amount of faith and hope possible and believe deeply that recovery and redemption are possible.

Don't focus on the massive undertaking of complete and total recovery spanning months or even years of digging out of the hole, because that is overwhelming and discouraging. Focus on what you can do right now, today, to take a step in the right direction and keep doing that repeatedly and see where it leads. Find, engage with, and take advantage of resources and programs that may be available to you.

The only thing you must change is everything. And when you do, take what you've learned and help someone else who's struggling that can benefit from your support and experience. You can inspire and give hope to the uninspired and hopeless, and your struggle and recovery story will be your greatest tool to provide the greatest good to all who are lucky enough to cross paths with the future you. ■



Sanvello Wellness App: How to Unlock the *Premium* Features for Free

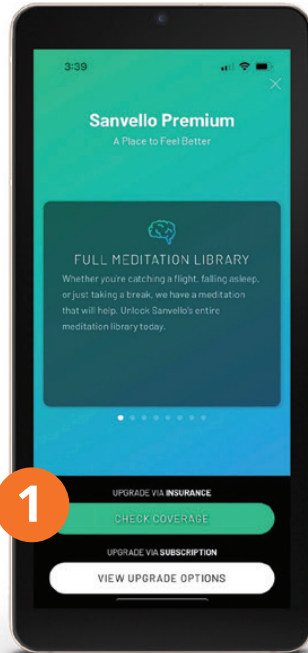
Did you know that all Optum Idaho Behavioral Health Plan members have access to the Sanvello app Premium version at no cost? The premium version of Sanvello grants full access to all in-app digital parenting resources and self-care content, including all Guided Journeys, tools, and meditations.

Download the app in either the Apple App Store or Google Play, and follow these steps to access Premium. ■

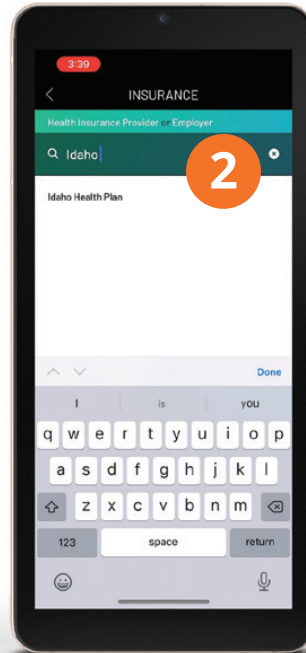


Learn more about the app at sanvello.com

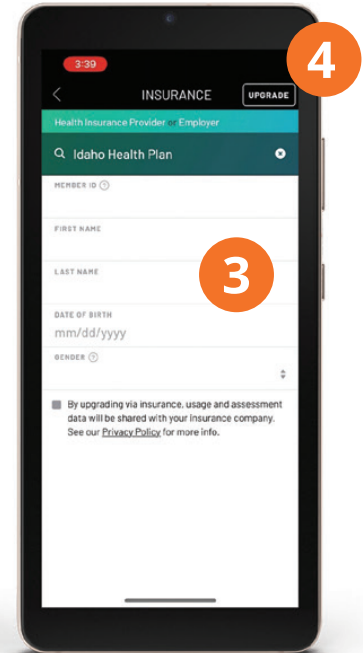
1 Click on the CHECK COVERAGE button.



2 In the SEARCH field type "Idaho" and select Idaho Health Plan.



3 Enter your information and be sure to use your Medicaid ID in the Member ID field.
4 Click UPGRADE in the upper right corner.



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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
200 Independence Avenue,
SW Room 509F, HHH Building
Washington, D.C. 20201

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لصتا ، يروف مجرتم بلطل . ةفلكت اى ل محت نود كت غلب تامول عمل او
مقرلاب .

German: Sie haben das Recht, kostenlose Hilfe und Informationen in Ihrer Sprache zu erhalten. Um einen Dolmetscher anzufordern, rufen Sie die Nummer **1-855-202-0973**.

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Russian: Вы имеете право на бесплатное получение помощи и информации на вашем языке. Чтобы подать запрос переводчика позвоните по телефону **1-855-202-0973**.

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Japanese: ご希望の言語でサポートを受けたり、情報を入力したりすることができます。料金はかかりません。通訳をご希望の場合は、**1-855-202-0973**までお電話ください。

Romanian: Aveți dreptul de a obține gratuit ajutor și informații în limba dumneavoastră. Pentru a cere un interpret, sunați la **1-855-202-0973**.

Sudan: Urafise uburenganzira bwo kuronka ubufasha n'amakuru mu rurimi gwawe ku buntu. Kugira usabe umusobanuzi, hamagara **1-855-202-0973**.

Persian: ناگوار روط هب ار دوخ نابز هب تاعالطا و کمک هک دیراد قح امش
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