

# Blue Distinction Centers+ (BDC+)

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**An analysis of the customer experience and journey, with accompanying recommendations for the communication of the BDC+ and SELECT BDC+ Program.**

Research Collection from June-August 2019

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## **High-Level Overview of BDC+ Program**

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The BDC+ program provides members with handpicked facilities for specific conditions and surgeries that are of higher quality, produce better outcomes, and are more affordable than others. Currently, there are several different communication strategies for Weyerhaeuser, Nordstrom, and Group 16, that are being used to promote and drive members to this program.

## **Goal of our Study**

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Assess all current member touchpoints and determine if the current strategies are the best approach for driving members to the BDC+ program.

Identify and recommend the most appropriate way to communicate and drive utilization of the BDC+ program, while ensuring the outcome is scalable to multiple groups.

## **Scope of our Study**

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For the purpose of this study, we have chosen to focus primarily on one group, ensuring our efforts are concentrated and scalable for other groups. Weyerhaeuser is our primary group of focus, as they currently have the most comprehensive plan selection options, nuances, and a group website for analysis.

# The BDC Differences

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## BDC vs BDC+

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<https://www.premera.com/weyerhaeuser/select-bdc/spinal-surgery/>

“The Blue Cross Blue Shield Association evaluates thousands of hospitals and surgical centers around the United States. Facilities that provide the highest expertise and best outcomes are designated as Blue Distinction Centers (BDC). Some of these centers are designated BDC+, which means that not only are they recognized for their expertise, but for the greatest value.”

<p><b>BlueDistinction<sup>®</sup> Center</b></p> <p>Blue Distinction Centers are healthcare facilities and providers recognized for their expertise in delivering specialty care.</p>	<p><b>BlueDistinction<sup>®</sup> Center+</b></p> <p>Blue Distinction Centers+ are healthcare facilities and providers recognized for their expertise and for <b>providing the greatest value.</b></p>
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## SELECT BDC+

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<https://www.premera.com/weyerhaeuser/select-bdc/spinal-surgery/>

“Blue Distinction Centers + facilities are designated through the Blue Distinction® Specialty Care program, coordinated by the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. BDC+ facilities are recognized for their proven expertise, high-quality care, and their efficiency in delivering specialty care.

The SELECT designation means that these facilities have been handpicked specifically for Weyerhaeuser and are located near Weyerhaeuser locations. They have been awarded the BDC+ designation from the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association because they demonstrate higher quality care and provide better overall outcomes, like lower readmission rates and fewer infections postsurgery.”

## High-Value Specialty Care

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<https://www.premera.com/specialty-care/>

“High-Value Specialty Care” is another name used for the BDC designation. There is a general landing page that explains what High-Value Specialty Care is and allows members to enter their group number to see what specialty care is available with their plan.

“Truth is, not all medical specialists offer the same quality of care. And higher cost doesn’t always equal higher quality.

You may find yourself needing high-cost care in a select high-volume medical specialty. Premera makes it easy to:

- Find medical facilities recognized by Premera and the BCBSA as top providers
- Weigh your options and navigate the process with a team of care specialists
- Get where you need to go with medical travel benefits

We want to provide you with access to high-value specialty care and help you make decisions that are informed—and that give you confidence in your care.”

## Centers of Excellence

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<https://catalyst.nejm.org/center-of-excellence-redesigning-payment/>

The Centers of Excellence Program was implemented in 2017 by the Washington State Health Care Authority “for eligible members of Uniform Medical Plan (UMP), the state’s self-insured plan.”

<https://www.hca.wa.gov/assets/ump/welcome-packet-coe-flyer.pdf>

Essentially this program behaves like the BDC+ and SELECT BDC+ program, offering low to no cost spine and total joint replacement surgeries, with travel and lodging benefits.

“The COE Program contracts with providers who specialize in treating certain medical conditions. These providers are named Centers of Excellence because they have proven their ability to provide exceptional service with successful results for patients with those conditions.

The COE Program currently includes:

- Capital Medical Center (Olympia) – for spine care. Capital has a history of serving state employees. It is owned and operated by RCCH HealthCare Partners, a national

leader in the delivery of high-quality, compassionate care in non-urban communities.

- Virginia Mason (Seattle) – for knee and hip replacement and spine care. Virginia Mason is recognized as one of the nation’s best healthcare facilities. Its network of primary and specialty care medical centers offers superior treatment results.

If eligible for the COE Program, you will get to choose where you receive services (depending on the procedure).”

## Current Specialty Coverage by Group

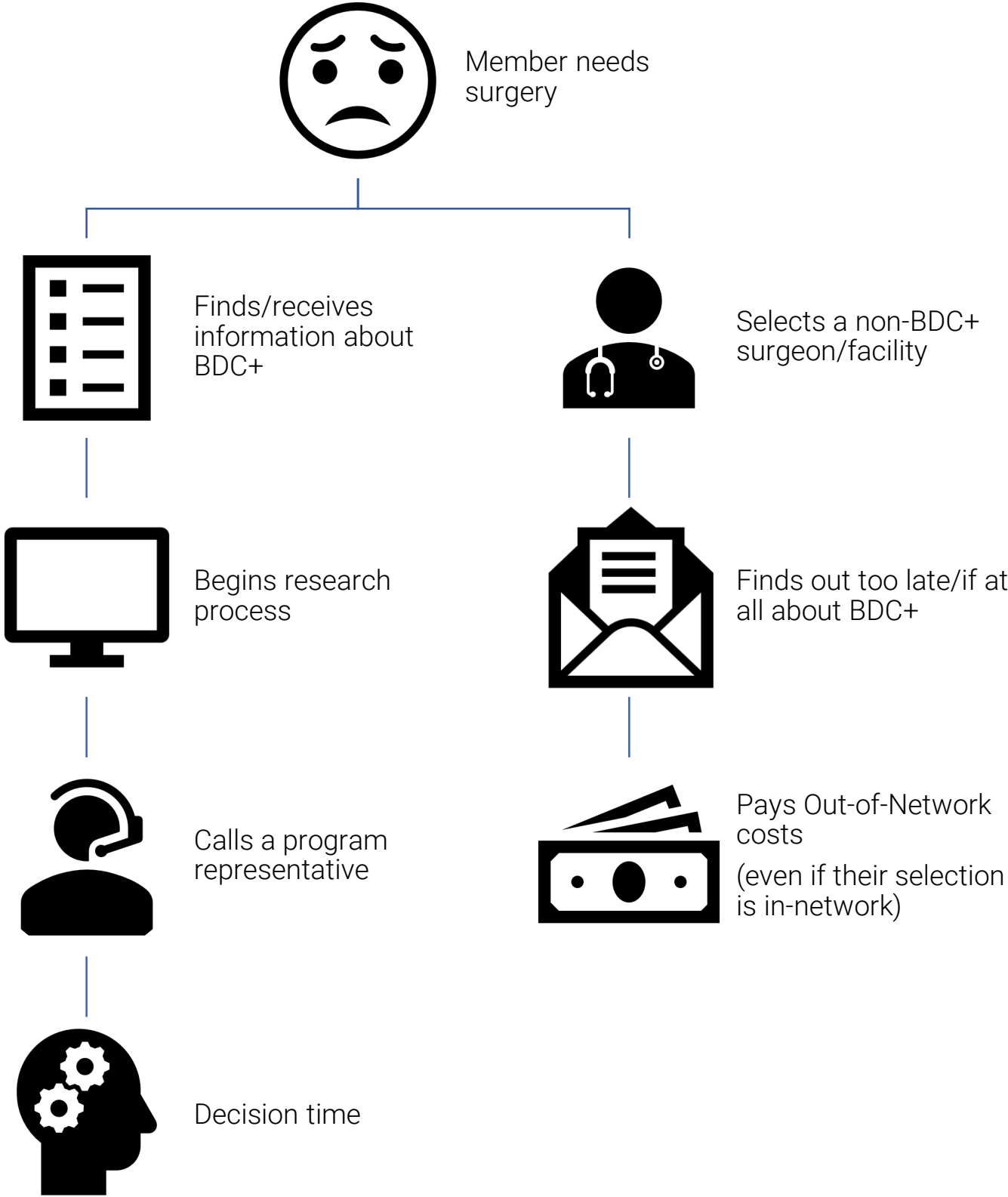
Group	Specialties Offered	SELECT BDC+	BDC+	BDC
Weyerhaeuser	Spinal Surgery	Yes	Yes	Not presented  (Non-BDC+ facility: includes BDC, in-network, and out-of-network facilities. All cost the same)
	Bariatric Surgery	No	Yes	Not presented  (Non-BDC+ facility: includes BDC, in-network, and out-of-network facilities. All cost the same)
Group 16 (Premera)	Knee & Hip Replacement	Yes	Yes, if living outside of WA or AK  No, if living in WA or AK	Not presented
	Spinal Surgery	Yes	Yes, if living outside of WA or AK  No, if living in WA or AK	Not presented
Nordstrom	Bariatric Surgery	Yes	No	Not presented
	Cancer Care	Yes	No	Not presented
	Cardiac Care	Yes	No	Not presented
	Knee & Hip Replacement	Yes	No	Not presented
	Maternity Care	Yes	No	Not presented
	Spine Surgery	Yes	No	Not presented
	Transplant	Yes	No	Not presented



## Current Benefit Coverage by Group

Group	Specialties Offered	SELECT BDC+	BDC+	Non-BDC+
Weyerhaeuser	Spinal Surgery	You pay 0%	You pay 15%	You pay 35%
	Bariatric Surgery	Plan pays 100%	Plan pays 85%	Plan pays 65%
		Deductible applies Travel benefits included	Deductible applies No travel benefits	Deductible applies No travel benefits  *Same cost for BDC, in-network facilities, and out-of-network facilities
Group 16 (Premera)	Knee & Hip Replacement	You pay 0%	Not presented	Not presented  *Different costs for in-network and out-of-network facilities
	Spinal Surgery	Plan pays 100%		
		Deductible applies Travel benefits included		
Nordstrom	Bariatric Surgery	You pay 0%	Not presented	Not presented  *Different costs for in-network and out-of-network facilities
	Cancer Care	Plan pays 100%		
	Cardiac Care			
	Knee & Hip Replacement			
	Maternity Care			
	Spine Surgery			
	Transplant			
		Deductible applies Travel benefits included		

# General Member Journey Diagram for Weyerhaeuser





Decision time

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SELECT BDC+

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BDC+

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Non-BDC+



Doctor and facility communication/experience



Travel and hotel communication/experience



Procedure experience



Post-op experience

# Healthcare Decision Making Factors

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The following research was conducted by Toni Saylor, a former Customer Experience Design Researcher, regarding the factors and drivers that influence decision making around finding care. To see the full literature review, visit Confluence at this link:

<https://premieracx.atlassian.net/wiki/spaces/DES/pages/1052673660/Health+Care+Decision+Making+Cross-Domain+Literature+Review+Dec+2018>

## Highlights of Research Study

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- Emotional/social fit is the most important factor for members when they choose a provider
- Reviews are frequently asked for because they (1) provide information about emotional/social fit, (2) provide emotional stories to meet members where they are at in an emotional process, and (3) provide the user with context for the criteria that was used to determine a rating
  - Members use reviews to evaluate emotional/social fit
    - Quality metrics that focus on healthcare outcomes don't resonate
    - Even quality metrics that focus on bedside manner won't make as much difference as an emotional story
  - Members are typically emotional when they are making choices about providers
    - When members are emotional, their choices are less rational
    - Providing members with the emotional information they are seeking meets them where they are
  - There is no standardization of methods, metrics, or results for quality in health care
    - Even when we provide numbers or ratings for quality, members want reviews
      - They want to know that the person evaluating was using the same criteria they were
- In the absence of reviews, members make choices based on the information available to them
  - Often the in-network status of a provider or location (distance from home/work)
    - But they don't actually know what "in-network" means
    - They think it'll be less expensive
- Cost is not a primary driver for members
  - They don't know how to predict what it will cost
  - If they find information, they don't trust it's accurate

- They don't know how health care costs work
- Cost becomes more of a driver for those who have less money to spend
  - But they also are more emotional
  - They still don't know how to find information they can trust about costs
  - So, they forgo care
  - Which leads to more expensive medical procedures later
- Health care shopping is not the same as other shopping
  - The market doesn't work the same way
  - There is no standardization of quality
  - Higher price is not an indicator of higher quality, especially higher emotional/social quality

## Recommendations Based on the Research

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Include testimonials, emotional stories, reviews, etc.

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- Why? Emotional and social fit are the most important factors for members, so we should use tactics that fulfill their emotional needs
- This may provide a better measure of quality than just the “BDC+” designation title does

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Make the designation options for our members extremely clear.

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- Why? When reviews aren't present, members use the information available to them to make decisions, often getting tripped up on things like “in-network” and cost
- Specifically, explain what is meant by “Non-BDC+ facilities,” as this can include BDC facilities, in-network facilities, and out-of-network facilities, each with varying costs
- Change the Blue Cross Blue Shield link for finding BDC+ facilities, as it contains information beyond the scope of our coverage offerings and leads to broken links

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Continue and grow to make the cost breakdown between options clear and transparent.

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- Why? Although cost is not a primary driving factor for all members, (but becomes more relevant for those who have less money), members find it difficult to predict and trust healthcare costs
- Continue clearly labeling the cost breakdown between options and providing contact information for members to reach out with questions
- Make the distinction between “Non-BDC+ facilities” more evident, better expressing the cost differences between BDC facilities, in-network facilities, and out-of-network

# UserTesting With People Who Have Spinal Issues

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The following research study was conducted on UserTesting.com, in which we recruited participants with similar attributes to Weyerhaeuser employees who have considered or undergone spinal surgery. We received feedback on his or her personal experience surrounding spinal surgery, as well as insight about the SELECT BDC+ program based on the initial targeted spinal letter Premera currently sends to Weyerhaeuser employees. To view the full UserTesting videos, visit the following link:

<https://www.usertesting.com/dashboard#!/study/2784941/sessions>  
<https://www.usertesting.com/dashboard#!/study/2786257/sessions>

## Research Goals

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Identify decision making process for individuals considering spinal surgery.

Determine when it would be best to inform individuals of alternate surgery options.

Determine the general impression of SELECT BDC+ from the initial targeted letter.

## Screening

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Age Range: 40 – 65 years

Country: United States

Salary Range: \$40k – \$100k

Industry: Airlines, Aerospace and Defense, Automotive, Business Support & Logistics, Construction, Machinery and Homes, Manufacturing, Other, Telecommunications, Technology, Internet and Electronics, Utilities, Energy, and Extraction

Company Size: Large 1001+ employees

1. What best describes your current health insurance situation?  
Acceptable answer: I have health insurance through my employer
2. Within the past year, I have undergone or considered undergoing:  
Must select: Spinal surgery  
May also select: Bariatric surgery, Cellular immunotherapy (CAR-T), Fertility care, Gene therapy, Knee or hip replacement

## Scenario and Tasks/Questions

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Today we would like to ask you a few questions about your experience with contemplating or undergoing spinal surgery. We would then like you to imagine your medical insurance company sent you a letter in the mail, and have you review the given letter.

1. What has your experience been like contemplating or undergoing spinal surgery? [Verbal Response]
2. What have you valued most during this experience or process? [Verbal Response]
3. Is there something you wish could have gone differently during this experience or process? [Verbal Response]
4. Imagine that your medical insurance company has sent you a letter in the mail. Please continue to the next step to view the letter.
5. Launch URL: <https://ut-assets.com/516f5aa0-e929-4d5b-98f0-b92b47893629/index.html>

You will be shown an image. Once you see it, move on to the next step. The rest of the questions in this interview will be about this document.

6. Please take a moment to review this letter. What is it about? Do you have any questions?
7. In your own words, what are the next steps?
8. Would you consider the SELECT BDC+ option for your spinal surgery if you were sent this letter in the mail?
9. When would it be best to be informed of the SELECT BDC+ option?
10. If you were already scheduled for surgery with a different doctor and facility, would you consider switching after receiving this letter in the mail?
11. Would you consider the SELECT BDC+ option for your spinal surgery if you were required to travel for surgery?
12. How would you want to learn about SELECT BDC+?
13. What is your general impression of the SELECT BDC+ offering?

# UserTesting of Weyerhaeuser Website Content

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The following is a summary of (4) UserTesting videos conducted by Joy Cordell on early stages of the Weyerhaeuser website content of BDC+ options for spinal surgery. While the videos were used largely in part for redesign implementations on the website, there is valuable user feedback regarding the perception of the program and expectations members have. To view the full UserTesting videos, visit the following link:

<https://www.usertesting.com/dashboard#!/study/2594318/sessions>

## Themes and Comments

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Members are wary of the Select BDC+ 100% coverage option and feel there must be a catch or ulterior motive.

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“I’m a little unclear what the benefit is to the company to pay 100% of my surgery costs. I wonder why--what's the catch? Why is there one option that's 100%?”

| Respondent 1

“I keep coming back to why a certain facility would pay 100%. I feel like there must be a catch and I’m not sure what that is. Seems too good to be true.”

| Respondent 1

“It’s trying to market me toward their preferred provider.”

| Respondent 3

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Members have a desire to see reviews and learn of other people’s experience with the program.

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“I think I'd still want to see some reviews or customer feedback from people who have previously had the surgery done at a Select facility, just to see what their experience was.”

| Respondent 1

“[I'd like to see] testimonials from people who have used [the program].”

| Respondent 2



| "I'd like to see some other success stories."

| Respondent 4

| "I want to see referrals, other people that've done this, how many people have gone through this program. The success rate of people who have gone through this and how they feel about it."

| Respondent 4

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Members feel the need to do additional research before calling a program representative.

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| "It sounds like a very good offer, I'd just want to read a little more about it."

| Respondent 1

| "If there were no links, I'd Google the facility."

| Respondent 2

| "I'd like links on there for my own research before I jump in."

| Respondent 3

| "I'd like to get more details before I called. Because, when I call, I want to have some questions and some information."

| Respondent 4

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The ability to travel prior to surgery is an important factor for members when determining which plan to select.

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| "Am I comfortable enough to be able to travel with my back problem?"

| Respondent 3

| "If I were in serious pain, and could travel, and take time off of work, I'd [choose] Select [BDC+]."

| Respondent 2

## Recommendations Based on the Feedback

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Express why Select BDC+ is being offered, doing so with a focus of care for our members.

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- Why? This will help to mitigate members' feelings about there being a "catch" with the Select BDC+ program and promote our passion for member wellbeing and garnering a positive experience in their difficult times.
- 

Include testimonials, emotional stories, reviews, etc.

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- Why? Members want to be ensured that this process went well for others, putting their minds at ease that there is no catch to the program. This also allows members to envision themselves having a similar positive experience to someone else who went through the process.
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Express that there are additional materials that can be sent or discussed after a call has been made to a Premera program representative. Ensure that all outside sources from search engines display accurate and explicit program details.

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- Why? Many members feel the need to conduct further research or do not know that more information can be made available to them after calling. Additionally, outside searches may be conducted by members, which could lead them to information that is not specific to their company coverage.
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Ensure and express that travel and hotel accommodations can be catered to our members' medical needs.

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- Why? The Select BDC+ option may require members to travel via airplane and stay in a hotel, which is potentially challenging for members prior to and following surgery.

# Premera Listens Feedback

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The following table is a collection of all the Premera Listens’ feedback regarding “Health Care Authority Centers of Excellence Program.” You can find the feedback online at the following link:

<https://cdaanalytics.corp.premera.org/#/site/DigitalProductsandDataServices/views/PremeraListensDashboard/Overall?iid=1>

Premera Listens Dashboard → Overall → Group Name: Healthcare Authority Centers of Excellence Prog

## Full Report and Member Comments

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Date	Comment	Touchpoint	ID
7/11/19	<p><b>Respondent 1:</b> My call was about who would be paying the physical therapy post-op. It was really pretty straight forward.</p> <p>However, there is a concern I do have about my accommodations while at the Virginia Inn hotel in Seattle that was covered under the Center for Excellence Program. We had checked in July 1. 2019. We were given a room with two standard twin beds. A standard mattress is 75" I am 6' 3" myself. That night I was able to sleep in that bed with no problem. My surgery was on July 2. On July 3 I was to be discharged back to the Inn. However, when the Occupational Therapist checked our hotel accommodations, she was not pleased that I was in a standard bed. She thought I should have been placed in a room with a longer bed. When I was finally released from the Hospital (after 5), I did ask to be upgraded to a queen bed--which is 80" in length--at the recommendation of the occupational therapist. I was told in no uncertain term at the front desk of the hotel that the standard bed was all that the Center for Excellence program would pay for. I immediately tried to call the Primiera Concierge Service, but since it was after five and the beginning of the holiday all I got was a voicemail. I left a message explaining my problem, but I did not get a reply until July 5 over 36 hours after I had brought up the concern with the front desk.</p>	Call	180395

	<p>My point is accommodations need to be provided for people taller than a standard 75 inch bed. And, even though there was a holiday, there should be a way to be able to get immediate assistance over the long weekend.</p> <p>While I am at it, I was disappointed in the standard room we had as it was. There was no refrigerator or microwave which is fairly common in a standard room these days. Moreover, I found the bathroom below par. The showerhead was broken. When I brought it to the attention of the front desk they did replace it, But the paint on the ceiling above the bathtub had significant water damage from the bathtub in the room above our room--water from the upper bathroom had caused peeling on the wall above our bathtub. I again brought this to the front desk. They said they would have maintenance repair the damage after we vacated the room. The deal is, routine inspection of the room should have caught this deficiency, and they should have been repaired long before we occupied the room, If I were to give a star rating on the presentation of the room, it would have been less than a three.</p> <p>Sorry to be so negative in this review. I only want to see the program improve. I think it is a great program for those who qualify.</p>		
6/7/19	<p><b>Respondent 2:</b> My experience with Premera has been great. Communication has been top notch. All my questions are answered when asked and the instructions and paperwork given to me was explained clearly. Shout out to the COE spine care team who made this experience flawless :) might include a little more instruction on parking. It is quite a ways away from the hotel and up a steep incline to get to the hotel from the parking garage. For someone heading there with back issues and leg pain, it was a little difficult.</p>	Premera Listens.com	174376
6/7/19	<p><b>Respondent 3:</b> The after my visit to Virginia Mason I was called and as I was in a meeting, was unable to answer. I did call back that day and requested a call back as I had questions. I never heard from anyone so I called again on May 29th and never got a call back. I called again on June 6th and still have not gotten a call back. The ladies I have spoken too are unable to answer my questions. My whole process going there has been amazing. Scheduling, directions, and each doctor visit. I left with more information than I have gotten from any doctor</p>	Provider Office Visit	174337

	thus far, super happy. The communication since the visit has been sub-par and may require some tweaking on your end.		
6/4/19	<b>Respondent 4:</b> They did a great job on my hip replacement and I'm doing very well—pretty much back to normal 3 weeks later.	Provider Office Visit	172636
5/21/19	<b>Respondent 5:</b> Dr MacDonald and the staff were wonderful. I never felt hurried or rushed. I was encouraged to contact the office if I had questions or concerns. I will definitely recommend to others!	Provider Office Visit	169610
5/9/19	<b>Respondent 6:</b> Parking was a nightmare. Limited to three garages under COE program and all were full. Good thing we got there early. The majority of my time in the doctor's office was actually spent with a PA who answered most of my questions. I met the specialist towards the end of the appointment and had maybe 10 minutes with him. I would have thought to spend most of my time with the specialist. He was to contact me regarding my Xrays but no call, no response to my email in MyVirginiaMason, or response to my call to them.	Provider Office Visit	167153
12/30/18	<b>Respondent 7:</b> On December 10th, I had a pre-op appointment for a knee replacement, and on December 11th, I had the knee replacement followed by about 24 hours in the hospital. All has gone great!	Provider Office Visit	140672

## Themes and Comments

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Communication has been strong in the earlier stages of the program process, after members have called a Premera program representative. Information between Premera and the member, and the initial scheduling/doctor visits have been clear.

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| “Communication has been top notch”

| Respondent 2

| “All my questions are answered when asked and the instructions and paperwork given to me was explained clearly.”

| Respondent 2

| “My whole process going there has been amazing. Scheduling, directions, and each doctor visit. I left with more information than I have gotten from any doctor thus far, super happy.”

| Respondent 3

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Member experience is weakest in the later stages of the program process. Hotel accommodations and pre and post operation communication/experience has been subpar in many cases.

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| “Include a little more instruction on parking. It is quite a ways away from the hotel and up a steep incline to get to the hotel from the parking garage. For someone heading there with back issues and leg pain, it was a little difficult.”

| Respondent 2

| “When the Occupational Therapist checked our hotel accommodations, she was not pleased that I was in a standard bed. She thought I should have been placed in a room with a longer bed... The standard bed was all that the Center for Excellence program would pay for.”

| Respondent 1

| “I never heard from anyone so I called again on May 29th and never got a call back... The communication since the visit has been sub-par and may require some tweaking on your end.”

| Respondent 3

| “Parking was a nightmare. Limited to three garages under COE program and all were full.”

| Respondent 6

| “He was to contact me regarding my Xrays but no call, no response to my email in MyVirginiaMason, or response to my call to them.”

| Respondent 6

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Communication, doctor and medical staff emotional/social fit, and surgery quality appear to have had the greatest impact on members’ program experience.

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| “There should be a way to be able to get immediate assistance over the long weekend.”

| Respondent 1

| “They did a great job on my hip replacement and I’m doing very well.”

| Respondent 4

| “Dr MacDonald and the staff were wonderful. I never felt hurried or rushed.”

| Respondent 5

| “I was encouraged to contact the office if I had questions or concerns.”

| Respondent 5

| “I met the specialist towards the end of the appointment and had maybe 10 minutes with him. I would have thought to spend most of my time with the specialist.”

| Respondent 6

## Recommendations Based on Feedback

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Ensure doctors and medical staff are adequately communicating and responding to our members questions and concerns.

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- Why? Members value strong communication and a thoughtful relationship with their doctors and medical team. Some have reported negative experiences with this, while others were extremely pleased. Our goal is to ensure all our members have a positive experience after we connect them to their new doctors.
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Make sure proper and pertinent hotel information and accommodations are available for our members undergoing surgery.

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- Why? For those having to travel and stay in hotels that Premera provides, we want to ensure that our members are adequately taken care of, especially when it concerns their medical needs and accommodations. There have been several cases with lack of parking instructions, displeasing rooms, and improper medical accommodations.



# Overall Recommendations

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The following list is a collection of all the aforementioned recommendations. For the reasoning that led to these recommendations, please review the “Recommendations” sections throughout this document.

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Include testimonials, emotional stories, reviews, etc.

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Make the designation options for our members extremely clear.

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Continue and grow to make the cost breakdown between options clear and transparent.

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Express why Select BDC+ is being offered, doing so with a focus of care for our members.

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Express that there are additional materials that can be sent or discussed after a call has been made to a Premera program representative. Ensure that all outside sources from search engines display accurate and explicit program details.

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Ensure doctors and medical staff are adequately communicating and responding to our members questions and concerns.

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Make sure appropriate travel and lodging information and accommodations are available for our members undergoing surgery.

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## Potential Next Steps

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Confirm details and document the current Weyerhaeuser employee interactions and utilization with the SELECT BDC+ program.

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- Although there have only been a few interactions with this option, and none of these interactions have gone “as intended,” documenting these will help to identify the current state of the program.

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Begin implementing some of the recommendations, being attentive to customer feedback and experience.

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- Make iterative adjustments in order to create the most positive impact for our members and this program.

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Continue to push for improvements on the Premera Weyerhaeuser website, especially with regards to plan option clarity.

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- Change the landing page
  - Instead of the communication pieces directing members to the Premera Weyerhaeuser home page, consider taking them directly to their surgery page
- BDC Difference page should include the difference between SELECT BDC+ *in addition to* BDC+ and BDC
  - The current page only describes the difference between BDC and BDC+
- Non-BDC+ category should better express what falls under this category, ensuring members understand you pay just as much as you would out-of-network when you choose an in-network provider
  - BDC
  - In-network
  - Out-of-Network
- The tab at the top of the page should not be titled, “SELECT BDC+” when the “Bariatric Surgery” page under it currently does not offer a SELECT BDC+ option

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There is a program name change underway.

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- There are talks that the program is about to undergo a name change, so consideration of this should be applied moving forward.