

Improving Health Care Access in the Rockaways and Staten Island

We have launched a pair of initiatives aimed at expanding its presence and improving health care access in two underserved areas of New York City—the Rockaways, a barrier island community on the southern edge of Queens, and the borough of Staten Island.

“These are communities with higher rates of chronic illness and less access to health care than other parts of the city,” explains Gloria, Director of Strategic Account Development for VNS Health. “Our initiatives aim to address those gaps by increasing the footprint of our provider services and our health plans in these neighborhoods.”

To support this effort, we have established a Strategic Action Group (SAG) in each of the two target areas. These SAGs include representatives from VNS Health Home Care, Hospice, Personal Care and Health Plans, many of them frontline team members who have lived and worked in these communities for years and are personally connected to the neighborhoods.

In the Rockaways, where the organization’s health plans already have a neighborhood walk-in office, we are now collaborating with JASA (Jewish Association Serving the Aging), which operates a retirement complex with 1,000 seniors in the Rockaways, to

bring additional services to their clients. We are also working closely with physicians in the community to make them aware of how we can support their patient population, and has begun partnering with local skilled nursing facilities to provide in-house hospice services as needed.

“As our activities in these communities expand, we’re growing the teams serving these areas through active recruitment,” reports Rosin, an account director who helps lead the Rockaways initiative. “Our Home Care team, for example, recently hired a number of additional clinicians for their Rockaways operations.”

The Staten Island SAG, which launched more recently, is currently focused on enhancing our relationships with local care providers. “Staten Island’s demographics have been changing rapidly, resulting in some gaps in care,” notes Gloria. “The borough’s Asian population has increased substantially and now constitutes 13% of its residents. This is a population that we have a long history of serving, so we’re working now to hire additional Cantonese- and Mandarin-speaking nurses and rehabilitation therapists for the area.”

Staten Island also has a large and growing geriatric population in need of home-based care, notes Gloria, as well as a number of veterans who could benefit from our Veterans Outreach Program.

“The message we’re sending is that VNS Health offers one-stop shopping for Staten Islanders—from our health plans to our home care, hospice care and home health aide services,” says Gloria. “If you’re a Staten Island physician or hospital, we have the

bandwidth to take care of your patients at any point in their life.”