



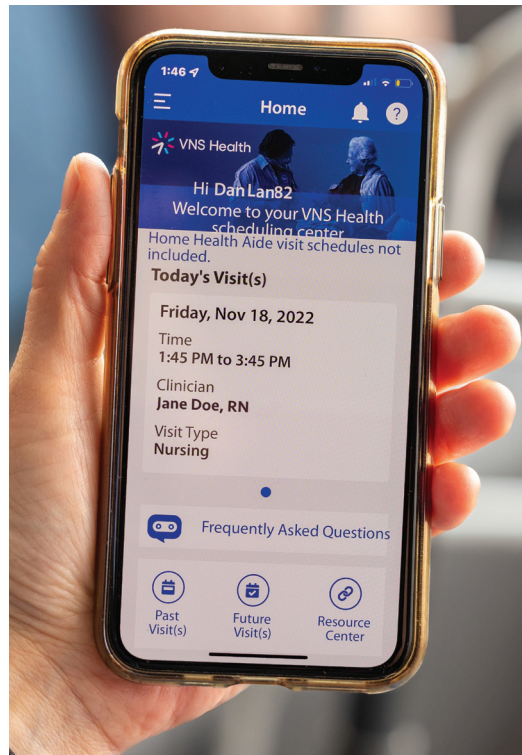
## New VNS Health Home Visit App Improves Patient Experience

With VNS Health's new "My Home Care" app, home care patients simply have to tap on their smartphones to see when their next visit from a VNS Health nurse, rehab therapist or social worker will take place. (Information on home health aide visits will be added in future upgrades.) They can also use the app to view upcoming scheduled VNS Health visits and receive important updates about these visits. In addition, the app lets patients provide feedback to VNS Health and connects them to helpful home care information and resources.

"We've designed the My Home Care app to be very user-friendly," says Jennifer Brullo, VNS Health's Senior Vice President for Patient Care Services. "Patients who have been admitted to VNS Health Home Care can download the app at no cost from the Apple or Android app stores, simply by typing 'VNS Health' into the search bar. We also have a secure verification system that allows patients to register on multiple devices for easy access to their visit schedules."

Once the app is downloaded, it takes

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*VNS Health's new "My Home Care" app gives patients at-a-glance information on upcoming clinician appointments—including when the patient's next visit from a VNS Health clinician will take place and future scheduled visits.*

## VNS Health Awarded NYC Contract to Provide HHA Services in Brooklyn

VNS Health has been awarded a contract from NYC Aging (formerly New York City's Department for the Aging) to deliver home health aide (HHA) services to over 700 Brooklyn seniors in communities across the borough, starting in January 2023. These services are being offered through NYC Aging's Home Care program, which provides non-medical care for capable and independent older adults who are living safely alone at home, but need some assistance with activities of daily living. VNS Health was selected for the contract from a pool of over 30 providers.

VNS Health will be collaborating with seven Brooklyn case management agencies who will do the initial assessments to identify appropriate clients for the Home Care program. VNS Health HHAs will then be assigned to provide several hours of care per day to the program's clients for up to 20 hours per week—helping them with shopping, cleaning, meal preparation, personal care and other daily tasks.

"The city's Home Care program contracts with one organization for each borough,

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### Also in this issue:

- Behavioral Health Team Receives Grant for Suicide Prevention Program
- VNS Health Opens New Community Centers in Brooklyn and Queens
- VNS Health CEO Advocates for Deferring Medicare Home Health Cuts

## Jim Rolla, Senior VP for VNS Health Personal Care, on Recruitment and Retention of Home Health Aides

**With the number of older Americans steadily increasing, there's a growing shortage of home health aides (HHAs) nationwide. What is VNS Health doing to address this issue?**

Recruitment and retention are top priorities for us. We're very focused on growing and maintaining our HHA workforce, and we're seeing good results. In our most recent employee engagement survey that we conducted earlier this fall with our HHAs, the percentage of aides who said they would recommend VNS Health and

feel that it's a great place to work was a whopping 89%. Our retention rate has also increased substantially. And while recruitment remains a challenge, we're seeing an uptick there, as well.

**What have you been doing to get these strong results?**

Much of what we're doing traces back to the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. When our aides stopped coming into our offices in person, we had to develop new ways

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# VNS Health Opens Community Centers in Sunset Park and Flushing

In early December, VNS Health opened two new storefront community centers in Sunset Park, Brooklyn and Flushing, Queens. The centers will provide a range of free offerings for area residents, including programs tailored to the large Asian American populations in those neighborhoods.

Like VNS Health's Chinatown Community Center in downtown Manhattan, the main focus of the two new centers will be helping local community members, especially seniors, live safely and independently in their homes. Both centers feature bright, newly renovated spaces where community members can attend classes and workshops and community organizations can also meet. Bilingual Chinese-speaking staff members, who collectively speak five different Chinese dialects, are also available at both locations to provide information on VNS Health's services as well as other community resources.

"We're excited to launch these two vibrant neighborhood hubs," says Teresa Lin, VNS Health's Vice President for Cultural Market Development. "We believe they'll have significant benefits for the health and well-being of community members—especially non-English-speaking Asian seniors, who often need assistance connecting with local health and social support networks."

All three of VNS Health's community centers are open to the public from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., seven days a week. "Anyone is welcome to drop in or call us at any of our community centers during business hours," adds Lin. "By providing easy access to our care and services and making them simple to understand and culturally relevant, we are aiming to have a meaningful, ongoing positive impact on the health of these diverse communities."



Like VNS Health's Chinatown Community Center, the organization's two new centers are focused on helping local community members, especially seniors, live safely and independently at home.

## Contact Information for VNS Health's Community Centers:

### Sunset Park Community Center

5521 8th Avenue, Brooklyn • 718-477-4733

### Flushing Community Center

135-52 39th Avenue, Queens • 718-321-7695

### Chinatown Community Center

7 Mott Street, Manhattan • 212-619-3072

## VNS Health Medicare Advantage Earns Highest CMS Rating in NYC and Long Island

For the second year in a row, VNS Health Medicare has earned a rating of 4.5 out of 5 Stars from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). No other Medicare Advantage plan in New York City or Long Island received 4.5 Stars in the latest ratings, making VNS Health the top-ranked Medicare Advantage payer in these areas. Since the rating is given to VNS Health Medicare as a whole, it applies to all three VNS Health Medicare Advantage plans—VNS Health EasyCare, VNS Health EasyCare Plus and VNS Health Total—for 2023.

"This milestone reflects the tremendous job being done by VNS Health's entire Health Plans team, and it also reaffirms our mission to improve the health and well-being of New Yorkers," says Dr. Hany Abdelaal, President of VNS Health Health Plans.

CMS's yearly ratings evaluate the overall quality and performance of Medicare plans across the U.S. on a scale of 1 to 5, based on factors like customer satisfaction, access to health care, and how well a plan delivers preventative care to its members. The ratings, which came out just before the start of Medicare's annual open enrollment period in mid-October, are designed to help people choose a plan that best fits their individual health care needs.

"We've worked hard to create quality plans that meet the complex needs of the people we serve and provide them with easy access to the health care they need," notes Abdelaal. "We're



VNS Health Medicare Advantage received a 4.5-Star quality rating from CMS for the second year in a row—outscored all other MA plans in New York City and Long Island.

extremely proud of this 4.5 Star rating for 2023—and we're especially pleased to be able to offer our members and potential members the highest-rated Medicare Advantage plans in New York City, Nassau and Suffolk."



# VNS Health Receives NYS Grant for Suicide Prevention Among LGBTQI+ and BIPOC Youth

New York State's Office of Mental Health has awarded VNS Health's Behavioral Health team a one-year, \$775,000 grant to implement an innovative program aimed at preventing suicide among at-risk adolescents and young adults who are of color or LGBTQI+. The program, called "Safe Pathway," has several components:

- VNS Health staff will provide direct services to New York City residents aged 10 to 24 identified as being at risk of suicide, with a particular focus on members of the LGBTQI+ and BIPOC (black, indigenous and people of color) communities.
- The staff will also refer clients for substance use treatment, psychiatric services and/or psychotherapy as needed.
- The program will train staff at partnering community organizations in how to screen for suicide risk and connect at-risk individuals with treatment services—including referring them to VNS Health.
- The program will also hold educational sessions on suicide prevention in the community.

"Our goal is to create a safety net for at-risk youth and young adults," explains Deirdre DeLeo, Director of VNS Health's Behavioral Health Crisis and Assessment programs. "To accomplish this, we're building a network of families, schools, partners and community resources that will work collaboratively to create accessible, high-quality care and education around suicide risk and prevention."

The program is now hiring clinical team members, including two licensed mental health specialists and three youth peer advocates. Starting on January 1, 2023, these clinicians will provide treatment services at VNS Health's Behavioral Health Clinic in the South Bronx, as well as client-facing locations in Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens. The program has also assembled a coalition of 11 community partners that will meet monthly to share outcomes and best practices.

"The majority of young people who are suicidal report being unable to access mental health services, so connecting these youngsters with treatment is key," notes Alex Karydi, Director of New Product Development for the Behavioral Health team. "Linking them with social support is also essential. Research shows that LGBTQI+ and BIPOC individuals are not inherently prone to suicide risk because of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or racial/ethnic background. The reason they're at higher risk is because of how they are mistreated and stigmatized by society."



*Funded by a New York State grant, VNS Health's Safe Pathway program will work with New York City residents aged 10 to 24 identified as being at risk of suicide, with a particular focus on members of the LGBTQI+ and BIPOC communities. Program services include direct counseling and referrals for psychiatric care, substance abuse treatment and psychotherapy.*

## Safe Pathway Coalition Partners:

AFSP, Ali Forney, Be-InCK, Callen-Lorde, JCCA, Phoenix House, Pride Center Staten Island, Project Renewal/Marsha's House, Rainbow Heights, Sharpen Minds, Sheltering Arms

## NYC Contract to Provide HHA Services in Brooklyn

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and we were chosen to be Brooklyn's care provider for seniors in need," explains Kelly Harned, Vice President of Administration for VNS Health Personal Care. "We are so excited for the opportunity to support and serve this Brooklyn population!"



*Starting in January, VNS Health has been contracted by New York City to deliver home health aide services to over 700 Brooklyn seniors who live safely alone at home, but need some help with activities of daily living.*

## VNS Health Launches Home Visit App

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only a minute for a home care patient to register. When a patient opens up the app, they'll see key information on scheduled visits including the clinician's name, a two-hour arrival window (which is posted automatically as soon as the timing of that visit is set), and the services, such as nursing care or physical therapy, to be provided.

In addition to the smartphone version, patients can access the app online through any desktop computer or laptop. The app is available to patients across VNS Health Home Care's service area of New York City, Westchester, Nassau and Suffolk Counties. Since it was fully rolled out at the start of November, hundreds of eligible patients have opted to use the app, and VNS Health expects that number to rise in coming months.

"The feedback we're getting from patients has been extremely positive," notes Brullo. "By allowing them to check on upcoming visits at any time just by glancing at their phones, the My Home Care app really enhances the consumer experience and answers one of the most common questions patients have."

# VNS Health CEO Dan Savitt Advocates for Deferring Medicare Home Health Cuts

**D**an Savitt, President and CEO of VNS Health, has been taking a prominent role in the home health care industry's efforts to convince the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to defer Medicare reimbursement cuts for home health care services, which are due to start in 2023.

On a recent trip to Washington DC, Savitt met with Congress members Yvette Clarke (D-Brooklyn) and Paul Tonko (D-Capital Region), both members of New York's Congressional delegation, as well as key staff from Senator Majority Leader Chuck Schumer's office and the powerful Senate Finance Committee.

Citing VNS Health's experience, Savitt pointed out that the cuts will have a devastating impact on the home health care industry's ability to provide home health care to seniors and people with disabilities, by making it even harder than it is now to recruit and retain home health nurses and other frontline staff. Fewer patients will receive needed home health care and hospital capacity will be further strained with delayed discharges, with already underserved communities suffering the most. For this reason, Savitt requested that Congress delay the cuts by one year and require greater rate-making transparency from CMS in their end-of-year legislative package.

Savitt also recently published an online column highlighting the impact of the cuts on an already over-burdened home health care system. "Entire communities across the country are now becoming 'home health deserts'—areas where virtually no home health care is available," he wrote. "These are communities already starved of health



*VNS Health CEO Dan Savitt has been a prominent voice urging CMS to defer its planned cuts in Medicare home care reimbursements. On a recent visit to Washington, DC, he met with Congressmember Yvette Clark of Brooklyn (above left with Savitt) and others to make his case.*

services—usually Black, Brown, and rural communities, where health disparities continue to rise." Savitt went on to note that this "is a growing crisis," and that with the planned Medicare cuts, "it's about to get much worse."

VNS Health's advocacy efforts to defer Medicare reimbursement cuts have extended to its frontline staff as well, 600 of whom have emailed their members of Congress, urging them to act.

## Jim Rolla Q&A

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to connect with them. One of the most important things we did was completely revise the training and workflow for our HHA supervisors, so they could devote their time to supporting the HHAs they manage and building those relationships. We also ramped up our digital communications to the HHAs. Pre-COVID, most contact with HHAs was through phone calls and in-person meetings. We now have a dedicated online resource center for our HHAs, which has been a huge success at keeping them updated and engaged. We also implemented a new mobile phone app with Home Health Aide Exchange—or HHAx for short. This app gives HHAs easy access to all necessary information in one place. Utilization rates for the app are increasing, and our aides who use it report they really like its convenience. And we have a streamlined digital scheduling system that lets HHAs directly accept cases using their smartphones.

### **VNS Health recently got federal funding support for HHA recruitment and retention. Can you tell us about that?**

We received \$12 million through the American Rescue Plan that Congress passed in 2021. Almost all of that has gone either toward retention and COVID-related bonus payments for our current HHAs to reward their heroism during the pandemic, or to develop hiring strategies for regions where HHA recruitment is especially challenging for us. We're now disbursing the last of those federal funds. We're also



*Engaging HHAs and providing them with regular feedback "is critical," says Rolla. "Home health aides are an extremely dedicated group, and they want to be recognized for the work they do."*

kind of feedback and engagement is critical. Home health aides are an extremely dedicated group, and they want to be recognized for the work they do. It's not just about the money—although that's important, too.

### **Looking ahead, what is the key to sustaining an adequate HHA workforce over the long run?**

The health care industry needs to start thinking about the HHA workforce in a different way. Besides ensuring their physical health and safety, for example, we have to address their mental health needs. The job of an HHA is very hard, and we sometimes take that for granted. In addition, we need to continue to look for ways to expand the role of HHAs and make sure we're giving them opportunities to advance. Above all, there needs to be an economic awakening. Everyone is in favor of raising HHAs' wages, but there has to be funding in place to pay for it. VNS Health has done a lot to raise awareness about the value of the work that HHAs do, and we'll keep doing so. I think the industry is going to continue to move toward raising HHA wages and making this a more attractive career option, and we're going to be leading the way in helping to make that happen.

investing in a new bonus program that we're very excited about, which will launch early next year.

### **What does this new bonus program involve?**

Our new program, which we'll be launching in January 2023, is a collaboration with a company called Caribou Rewards that specializes in customized incentive plans. It lets HHAs accumulate points toward bonus payments when they hit certain goals, like accepting more cases per week or sharing a job opening with friends on social media. The program also sends encouraging digital prompts along the way, and it alerts the aide whenever a bonus is paid out and explains what the bonus is for. This



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