

The Disappearing Support for Home Health Care

It's a common situation: An older adult in New York falls, breaks a hip, and has surgery. The hospital recommends [home health care](#), a support system that includes [nursing](#), [wound care](#), and [physical therapy](#), delivered at home. But when it's time to go home, no agency can take the referral. That patient leaves the hospital without the supportive care their doctor prescribed.

How is this happening? According to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), New York has lost 29 home health agencies in just seven years. Admissions to Medicare [home health services](#) have dropped by more than 25 percent statewide, leaving over 260,000 New Yorkers without the care they needed. In some neighborhoods like the Bronx, the drop is even steeper: 38%.

These cuts are happening due to dropping Medicare reimbursement rates. Those rates have declined by 13% since 2020, with another 4% decrease forecast for the coming year. The result: Agencies across New York, including trusted providers like VNS Health, are struggling to hire enough skilled clinicians to take care of patients.

The Human Cost

When patients are denied the home health care they need, it can lead to more problems and even death. Families often

mobilize to try to care for their loved one, but it's not always enough. Complications happen from surgery, or a patient falls and has to go back to the hospital to receive more care—and start recovery all over again.

In fact, CMS data shows that seniors who don't receive recommended home care are 34% more likely to be readmitted to the hospital and 41% more likely to die. On top of the human cost, it's expensive, adding an average of \$2,450 in hospital-related costs for every patient.

A Call to Protect Home Health

As one of the largest nonprofit home- and community-based health care organizations in New York, VNS Health sees the impact of these funding cuts every day. From Manhattan through Long Island to Buffalo, the story is the same: Too many people need care, and too few resources are available.

Home health care is not a luxury; it's a critical piece of the health care system. It allows patients to recover at home where they're most comfortable, while reducing overcrowding of our hospitals. Most importantly, it's part of Medicare's promise: delivering care where people need it most. It should be [accessible and affordable](#) for those who need it.

Both Republicans and Democrats in New York's Congressional delegation have already urged CMS to stop further payment cuts. But more advocacy is needed. Lawmakers, community leaders, and families must continue to call for support.

Medicare home health care is essential for many families across the country. Without it, we risk pushing more patients into avoidable crises and stretching our health system beyond its limits.

VNS Health is committed to supporting patients where they need it most: in the home. But change will require action. The cuts to Medicare home health are already affecting our ability to deliver critical services, from home and personal care to behavioral health support and hospice care. By raising awareness and urging lawmakers to protect home health care, we can ensure older adults and others recovering at home have the care they deserve.

Adapted from an opinion piece by VNS Health President and CEO Dan Savitt. To read the original piece, visit [Crain's New York Business](#).

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