

Arnold's Story

How VNS Health Veterans Programs Serve Those Who Served

After Arnold, a veteran who served in the Vietnam War, passed away from prostate cancer related to his time in the service, his wife, Cecilia, didn't know that she could receive veterans benefits. She feared she would lose her house – until the experts from VNS Health's Veterans Hospice Care program, from which Arnold had received care during his last days, stepped in.

Cecilia vividly remembers the day she met Arnold. She was at a club when he approached her and asked to buy her a drink. She gave him her number but didn't expect him to reach out. When Arnold called the next day, Cecilia thought, "This guy is very nice. He's thoughtful. He's upfront." She decided to give him a shot – and they fell in love. The couple moved to Staten Island, where they lived happily and raised their son.

Years later, Cecilia was shocked and devastated when Arnold was diagnosed with stage 4 prostate cancer.

Hospice Care from the Comfort of Home

Arnold was diagnosed at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) hospital in Brooklyn, and his oncologist recommended home hospice care from VNS Health. Throughout his time at the VA hospital, the staff, who wanted him to be at home with his family, would say "What a man, what a man!" when describing him.

Arnold began home hospice care during the height of the

COVID-19 pandemic. “I asked them how they were going to do it,” Cecilia recalls. “And they said, ‘Don’t worry. We’ll take care of it.’ They did it. Everything possible. Different nurses coming in here, teaching me how to treat him. Changing him and feeding him. Dealing with his medications. I’m not a nurse. I had to learn all that. They were there for me.”

During his time in hospice, Cecilia stayed by Arnold’s side. Whenever she put ice on his mouth or fed him soup, he would grab her hand and softly tell her that he loved her. He would thank her for being there for him.

In his last moments, he would grab me and he wouldn’t even let go of my hands. He would say, ‘I love you. I love you.’ It meant the world to me that I was able to be part of the last minutes, the last seconds.

– Cecilia, wife of a VNS Health hospice patient

Helping Cecilia Access Veterans Benefits

After Arnold’s passing, Cecilia was devastated not only by his death but also by her new financial situation. She spent sleepless nights wondering how she would be able to pay the mortgage by herself. Her son suggested selling the house, but she did not want to leave the home she had known for more than 30 years – or her neighbors, who were like family.

That’s when Frank, a benefits support coordinator of the VNS Health Veterans Hospice Care program, entered the scene.

Frank informed Cecilia that Arnold’s prostate cancer was actually related to his time in Vietnam. Arnold had likely been exposed to Agent Orange, a highly toxic herbicide that can cause serious health issues. Vietnam veterans who develop Agent Orange–related conditions are usually eligible for

disability benefits.

Frank told Cecilia that she would likely qualify for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC), a tax-free monthly benefit for survivors of veterans who died from an injury or a disease related to their time in service.

Cecilia, who had never heard of DIC, felt uncomfortable at first. “I said to myself, ‘This is not going to work.’ My plan B was that if it didn’t work out, I was going to sell the house.”

Frank helped Cecilia get started on the application process right away. And 4–6 weeks later, Cecilia received her first DIC payment.

Veterans Programs at VNS Health

The [VNS Health Veterans Hospice Care](#) program goes beyond [traditional hospice services](#). The team is made up of veterans and VA experts who are specially trained to care for people with unique medical issues that may result from military service, including:

- Service-related injuries and illnesses
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Survivor’s guilt
- Depression
- Substance use problems
- Effects of exposure to radiation or chemical agents such as Agent Orange

Team members can also help with veteran-specific issues, like applying for VA benefits and recovering discharge papers or medals.

When I’m able to connect a veteran to resources, it makes me

feel like I've done my job right. I have served my purpose, helping another veteran out. Because I know there's community resources to take care of them in a system through times of need.

– Victor, outreach liaison, VNS Health Veterans Outreach Program

VNS Health also has an [outreach program](#) and a [home care program](#) that provide services for veterans who are not in hospice but who need care for conditions related to their time in the military, like brain injuries or certain types of cancer.

“They Rescued Me”

Frank recalls how excited Cecilia was when she received her first DIC payment: “She was just so happy that this benefit was there for her. It was something she never knew about.”

Every year on Memorial Day, Cecilia celebrates her husband's memory by attending a parade with her family. And during the week before Christmas, she always calls VNS Health to thank them for the program and what they did for her.

“They were there for me. They took care of me. They acknowledged my situation. They rescued me.”