Chang’s Story

Inspiring Hope Through Vaccine Access

This pandemic year deepened the isolation of many older Chinatown residents, separating them from families, community activities, and regular care for multiple health conditions. The COVID-19 vaccine offered hope but was hard to access for a population that doesn’t speak English, doesn’t often use technology, and faces barriers to health literacy. One resident, 73-year-old Chang*, said, “When the vaccine came out, the first thing that came to my mind was, ‘I want it,’ but it was so difficult to get appointments.”

In the early months of the rollout, VNS Health’s Neighborhood Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NNORC) and our community center in Chinatown stepped in to help more than 700 residents—including Chang and his 88-year-old sister—get vaccinations, scouring websites to find appointments, leveraging both organizations’ close partnerships to collaborate with city health officials, and even, for NNORC members, arranging transportation to and from appointments.
The NNORC and the community center also educated the community on the vaccine, as they had done on the virus from the outset.

“Thanks to VNS Health, my life is finally taking a step towards normalcy,” says Sue, a member of the VNS Health Community Center in Chinatown.

“Some of our members were totally isolated, stressed, scared to go out,” says Helen, manager of the NNORC. “They had to stop seeing family and taking care of grandchildren. Since the vaccinations, they feel much better, are reconnecting with family. Life is back to normal.”

For Chinatown resident Sue, who suffers from diabetes and hypertension, the vaccine brought the first sense of hope in a year of despair, anxiety, and isolation. At first, the vaccine was not easy to come by, even with her son searching websites in the middle of the night for appointments. She was thrilled when Christine, a community center team member, secured appointments for Sue and seven friends in a single afternoon. Now Sue feels comfortable going to the grocery store, seeing her children, and even taking a day trip with vaccinated friends. “For a year, our lives were flipped completely upside down with home confinement,” she said. “I was truly tired, emotionally, mentally and physically. Thanks to VNS Health, my life is finally taking a step towards normalcy.”

*Patient and family names have been changed to protect privacy.*