



## VNS Health One-Stop “Hub” Provides Swifter Solutions to Consumer Inquiries

As part of its push to make health care solutions simple to understand, easy to access and meaningful in outcomes, one of VNS Health’s key goals is to seamlessly coordinate the various clinical and support services it delivers to its consumers. “We want people to experience us as ‘One VNS Health,’ no matter how many different parts of the organization they’re working with,” notes Dan Savitt, VNS Health’s President and CEO.

This summer, the organization took another major stride toward that goal with the launch of the VNS Health Hub—an online portal containing records of every patient,

*Continued on page 3*



VNS Health’s new online Hub shows every interaction that consumers have with the organization—allowing contact center agents to quickly retrieve all information needed to assist callers.

## New MA Plans Build on Strong First-Year Showing

With Medicare’s open enrollment period scheduled to kick off on October 15, VNS Health’s two new Medicare Advantage (MA) plans—EasyCare and EasyCare Plus—are looking to build on their strong first-year performance in 2022.

“In this highly competitive New York market, we’ve experienced positive enrollment every month of this year, and as of September we’re approaching 2,500 members enrolled in the two plans,” says David Robinson, Vice President of Sales and Partnership Development for the health plans. “We’re also getting good feedback about the coverage the plans provide. And with another strong set of benefits slated for both plans in 2023, we’re excited about our prospects for the coming year.”

In alignment with VNS Health’s mission, the organization’s specialized MA plans feature benefits and a fee structure that are well-suited to people with low income levels: Many EasyCare members receive low-income subsidies, while EasyCare Plus is available only to people who receive both Medicare and Medicaid. “Between our two MA plans and VNS Health Total, our integrated Medicare-Medicaid plan that includes long-term care benefits, we have a full portfolio of Medicare plans designed

*Continued on page 3*

**Also in this issue:**

- New Study Explores Pandemic Impact on Home Health Aides
- Consumer Journey Mapping Aims to Improve Outcomes
- VNS Health Ramps up Nurse Recruitment

## Chief Strategy Officer David Rosales on VNS Health’s Growth Plans

**Earlier this year VNSNY rebranded to become VNS Health. How does this figure into the organization’s growth strategy?**

Since our founding 129 years ago by the public health pioneer Lillian Wald, VNS Health has always provided healthcare services to New Yorkers where they live. As the health care needs of New Yorkers evolved over the years, our organization has also evolved to meet those needs. Our aim now is to carry this unique legacy

forward, by expanding the reach and scope of our services beyond the New York area so we can impact even more people. We want do this in a coordinated way as one unified VNS Health—which our rebrand aligns us to do. By rebranding to VNS Health, we are continuing to draw on our historical legacy while also positioning

*Continued on page 4*



## VNS Health Receives \$12M in Public Funding to Bolster HHA Hiring and Retention

Coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, an increasing number of Americans are now opting to “age in place” in their homes. To meet this growing demand for in-home care, VNS Health is ramping up its recruitment of home health aides (HHAs) with the help of \$12 million in public funding.

The funding comes from the American Rescue Plan, which was enacted by Congress in 2021. It provides states across the country with additional Medicaid dollars to support the hiring, training and retention of HHAs. New York State designated its portion to home care organizations like VNS Health and other providers through a program to invest in the long-term care workforce.

The funding includes money earmarked for bonuses to VNS Health HHAs for their heroic work on the front lines of the pandemic; additional workforce retention bonuses; training subsidies; and money to implement new strategies for hiring VNS Health HHAs in Westchester, Nassau and Suffolk Counties—areas where HHA recruitment has been historically difficult.

The award is time-limited, and must be spent by March 31, 2023. “We’ve already distributed around \$2.6 million to our HHAs,” says Jim Rolla, Senior Vice President of VNS Health Personal Care. “We are grateful to the federal and state government for this funding to help us recruit new aides and help ensure that we keep the thousands of dedicated aides who are with us now, in order to meet the needs of our clients and members.”



*Money provided by Congress’s American Rescue Plan and distributed by the state of New York is being used by VNS Health to fund retroactive bonuses to HHAs for their heroic work during the pandemic. The funding is also being used for HHA recruitment, retention bonuses and training subsidies.*

## VNS Health Research Study Explores the Pandemic’s Impact on HHAs and Offers Recommendations

“I’m proud to be a home health care worker... without us I don’t know what people would have done during the pandemic.”

This statement sums up the unsung heroism of America’s home health aides (HHAs) during the COVID-19 pandemic. The quote from an HHA with VNS Health is part of a just-released study by the Center for Home Care Policy & Research at VNS Health on the challenges encountered by HHAs over the course of the pandemic. The research team also met with industry leaders and other stakeholders to develop recommendations on how to better protect and support the HHA workforce during future public health crises.

The study’s roots trace back to the early days of the pandemic, when Margaret McDonald, Associate Vice President at the Research Center, and her colleagues were struck by the fact that there was no mention of home health aides as New York’s healthcare heroes were receiving accolades.

“While there was well-deserved recognition of people working in hospitals, home health aides were also out there the whole time, going into people’s homes and working hard to keep them out of the hospitals,” says McDonald. “We really wanted to bring their experiences to the forefront to raise awareness for this workforce and what they’re facing.”

McDonald notes that the HHAs in the study were eager to contribute



*A just-released VNS Health Research Center study highlights the financial stresses HHAs experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The study also affirms the importance of effective communication between aides and their supervisors and offers recommendations for the future.*

to the conversation. More than 1,300 aides answered the Center’s survey questions, and dozens more participated in interviews and focus groups. Key takeaways included the finding that throughout the pandemic, most HHAs provided care continuously to their homebound patients. In fact, seven out of ten aides surveyed said they never turned down work during the pandemic.

COVID-related challenges noted by HHAs in the study included the industry-wide shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE) at the start of the pandemic. Aides also reported significant issues with public transportation, ranging from service interruptions to close proximity to other passengers.

The study’s findings also highlighted the financial stresses placed on aides by the pandemic, and the importance of effective communication—between HHAs and their supervisors, and between aides and the agencies employing them—as a support mechanism. Above all, the researchers emphasize that HHAs “must be recognized as an essential part of the health care system.”

“As somebody who looked at the data and transcripts, it was really beautiful to see the resilience of the HHAs and their willingness to work in a challenging situation,” says McDonald. “They were out there because their patients needed them. They understand their value, and we need to make sure that others do, too.”

# Consumer Journey Mapping Aims to Improve Outcomes and Experience for Care Management Clients

VNS Health has begun using a strategic tool known as “consumer journey mapping” to improve the experience and outcomes of its patients, clients and members as well as their family members. The tool is currently being piloted by VNS Health’s longitudinal care management program, which provides extended healthcare support for clients with multiple medical conditions.

“Ordinarily, an organization looks at all consumer interactions from its own internal point of view—but consumer journey mapping presents a view of the experience from the consumer’s perspective,” explains Kristen Mancinelli, Consumer Experience Trainer at VNS Health, who is helping to implement the new tool. “It enables us, the healthcare team, to understand the consumer’s entire journey, identify what matters most to them, and focus on key areas where their experience can be improved.”

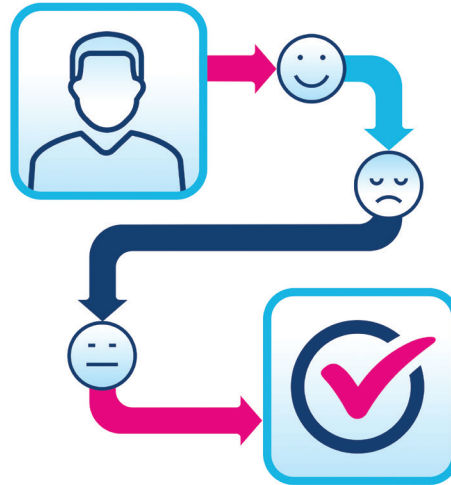
The process, which draws on input from VNS Health’s clients and team members, identifies how the entire consumer experience can be

enhanced. “Our goal is to ensure a successful series of interactions, rather than just focus on individual touchpoints—because research shows that’s what leads to better outcomes,” says Chad Ghastin, Vice President, Consumer Experience.

While that planning is still underway, one important action step has already been identified, which is to provide everyone involved in the

care management process with a centralized portal containing all relevant information on each client in the program, including their encounters with other parts of the organization. As it happens, VNS Health’s consumer support group recently launched just such a platform, called the VNS Health Hub (see page 1).

“The Hub will help close the gaps revealed in the mapping process,” notes Ghastin. “The fact that this idea was already in development further validates that our analysis is on the right track.” The consumer journey mapping team is also determining how to measure the project’s impact on client outcomes going forward, using metrics such as hospital readmission rates.



## New MA Plans Build on Strong First-Year Showing

*Continued from page 1*



VNS Health’s three Medicare plans—EasyCare, EasyCare Plus, and Total—offer seniors a full portfolio of affordable Medicare options to meet their changing needs.

meet our members’ needs as they change over time,” says Cindy Zanca, Vice President of Marketing.

The strong Year One start by the two MA plans recently helped drive combined enrollment in VNS Health’s five health plans over the 30,000-member mark for the first time. In addition, on October 1, the organization’s insurance offerings will transition from the VNSNY CHOICE brand to its new VNS Health branding. VNS Health’s new health plans website, [vnshealthplans.org](https://vnshealthplans.org), will go live that same day.

“It’s exciting to see the positive response that our different health plans are generating,” says Hany Abdelaal, President, Health Plans. “Most important of all, the success of our products means that New Yorkers have access to Medicare and Medicaid plans they can afford and that meet their healthcare needs—however challenging those needs might be.”

## VNS Health’s One-Stop Hub

*Continued from page 1*

client and plan member’s interactions with VNS Health. The Hub brings together data from nine separate software systems, allowing VNS Health’s contact center agents to quickly retrieve any information that might be needed to assist a given caller. The software platform also records the consumer’s phone calls to the contact center and archives all email exchanges within VNS Health regarding any issues the consumer might be having.

During an in-house pilot of the Hub earlier this year, the new platform got high marks from participating team members. One contact center agent noted, “The Hub is simple to navigate and makes searching for a consumer easier and faster.” Having the portal available also improved first-call resolution rate—meaning that a contact center agent is able to resolve a caller’s issue during their initial encounter.

“What I’m excited about is that our Hub platform truly puts the consumer at the center of the experience, by enabling our support team to quickly get callers to the person best positioned to meet their needs, right on that first call,” says Michael Bernstein, Executive Vice President and Chief Experience Officer.

The new system also makes it easier for contact center agents working with a certain part of VNS Health—Home Care, for example, or the Health Plans—to “cross over” and assist colleagues in a different line of business during times of high call volume.

“Many of our contact center agents are trained to provide cross-business support where needed,” explains Nancy Vitale, Vice President, Contact Center Operations. “But to be effective in that role, an agent has to be able to access a caller’s full history without wading through different databases. The Hub lets them do that.”

The Hub’s launch is the latest in a series of VNS Health consumer support enhancements. In 2021, the organization consolidated all of its support teams under a single management team and installed a cutting-edge phone system in its newly combined contact center. “All of these changes have a common objective,” says Senior Vice President Dan Wallis, who oversees the centralized consumer support function, “and that is to provide a consistently excellent experience for our patients, clients and members.”

# VNS Health Ramps Up Nurse Recruitment and Retention

Home Care registered nurses (RNs), licensed practical nurses (LPNs) and home health aides are in high demand across the U.S., and that's especially true in the New York metropolitan area. With a workforce of 1,200-plus nurses and plans to grow its core services, VNS Health is addressing this challenging environment head-on through a series of initiatives designed to attract top nursing talent. (To read about VNS Health's home health aide recruitment efforts, see page 2.)

"One of VNS Health's key strategic pillars involves a strong focus on our people and culture," says Tracy Dodd, Executive Vice President and Chief People Officer. "That focus includes an ongoing commitment to recruiting and retaining outstanding nurses, who will provide the best possible care to our patients, clients and members."

To support this push, VNS Health recently raised its base pay for new RN graduates and increased the sign-on bonuses for certain nursing positions. The organization has also created a recruitment hub dedicated to hiring field RNs and LPNs for VNS Health Home Care,



**Make an impact. Change lives.  
Know you're valued. With VNS Health,  
you are part of a team that's making  
a difference. Join us.**



*As part of its nursing recruitment and retention efforts, VNS Health is running ads like the one shown above that are aimed at potential nursing candidates. "Our ads highlight the benefits of working for a supportive, mission-driven organization," notes Jaime Martinez, Director of Talent Acquisition.*

and is conducting a multifaceted advertising campaign aimed at potential nursing candidates.

At the same time, led by its new Clinical Development Center (CDC), VNS Health is cultivating its pipeline of recent nursing school graduates. Key initiatives include strengthening VNS Health's ties with area nursing schools and expanding recruitment efforts for the VNS Health nurse residency program, which provides two-year home care education, training and support to select RN graduates.

The CDC also plays a critical role in VNS Health's retention strategy, which centers on providing enhanced professional development and advancement opportunities for team members. "Employees are far more likely to stay with an organization they believe is invested in their careers," explains Lynne Iati, Vice President for Talent & Learning. "We're extremely committed to helping our nurses and all clinical employees progress at VNS Health. That includes providing clinical career pathways and tuition

reimbursement opportunities along with the support and guidance needed to advance up the clinical ladder."

## David Rosales Q&A

*Continued from page 1*

ourselves as an innovative home- and community-based care leader. This concept is also captured in our new tagline: "The Future of Care. The Comfort of Home."

### How does VNS Health envision doing this?

Our growth opportunities fall into two categories. One involves the expansion of our core programs and health plans—the services we've been providing for decades, where we have tremendous expertise and deep market presence. We're concentrating heavily on recruiting and retaining talented team members, so we can increase our capacity to provide home care, hospice care, behavioral health and managed long-term care health plan services to individuals who need them. We're also partnering with local physician organizations to help connect their vulnerable patients with our services. And we're engaging with specific cultural groups—for instance, we'll soon be opening two new VNS Health community centers in Flushing and Sunset Park, where multilingual staff will help connect clients with healthcare services and other resources.

### Looking beyond those core services, what new offerings are in the works?

Our other growth opportunity involves leveraging VNS Health's established capabilities by partnering with other health plans and health systems to provide innovative healthcare solutions for individuals with complex care needs—both within New York State and across the country. We're marketing these products and services as part of our new VNS Health Professional Solutions business line.

### Can you give some examples?

One service we're offering to other organizations is VNS Health's care management expertise. We use a team-based, tailored approach to manage the health of individuals with complex medical and/or social issues, drawing on technology like remote patient monitoring where appropriate. This service includes helping people access resources that address their social determinants of health. We're currently in discussions with several organizations on how we can support them with these care management solutions. We can also help provide access to palliative and hospice care for health plan members with life-limiting illnesses. In addition, we're leveraging our historical patient and member data to develop advanced predictive analytics and other technologies that we'll be offering to other organizations. We're already seeing strong interest in our HELPS tool, which uses a sophisticated algorithm to determine people's need for personal care support in the home.

### On a personal note, you first joined VNS Health in 2005, and you've returned twice since then. What brought you back?

It's really this idea that we've always met people where they are. I was working in the finance sector in 2005 when I read an amazing article about how the Nurse-Family Partnership, one of VNS Health's safety-net programs, mentors young, at-risk mothers and their babies, and the long-term impact this intervention can have on the lives of both mom and child. That caught my attention, and it's why I decided to interview for a job here. It's also why I came back to VNS Health after leaving to attend graduate school. What we do is very special, compared to traditional kinds of healthcare systems. When I rejoined VNS Health a second time as Chief Strategy Officer four years ago, the organization was just embarking on the mission-driven, long-term strategy we're now engaged in. The opportunity to support the health and well-being of even more individuals and families going forward is incredibly exciting, and I'm happy to be a part of it.



VNS Health Today is published by VNS Health  
220 East 42nd Street, New York, NY 10017