



CRAIN'S HEALTH PULSE NEW YORK

October 23, 2019 05:30 AM | 2 HOURS AGO

State green-lights expansion of HIV Medicaid special needs plan beyond NYC

Plus:

- Nurses, health facilities battle over staffing
- Maimonides tapped for national integrated care effort
- EmblemHealth to relocate claims-processing jobs

JENNIFER HENDERSON  

JONATHAN LAMANTIA   

The state Department of Health has approved the Visiting Nurse Service of New York's expansion of its special needs plan for Medicaid-eligible individuals who have HIV/AIDS, identify as transgender or are homeless into Nassau and Westchester counties.

The expansion of the VNSNY Choice SelectHealth Special Needs Plan marks the first outside the city by an HIV Medicaid special needs plan. Originated in 2003, HIV special needs plans cover the same services as other Medicaid health plans but also provide specialized care coordination, including an HIV-experienced primary care provider, care managers and other specialists.

In Nassau County, SelectHealth is partnering with Northwell Health and Dr. Joseph McGowan. In Westchester, it's partnering with Montefiore Medical Center in Mount Vernon, New Rochelle and White Plains and Hudson River Health Care, a federally qualified health center with nearly 30 locations.

Though the incidence of HIV/AIDS is concentrated in the five boroughs, "we thought it met our mission to expand this care-coordination model to those who need it," said Thomas Dwyer, senior vice president of VNSNY Choice SelectHealth. The plan serves about 3,000 members in the city.

On average, members have been with the plan for five years, he said.

The specialized services provided by the plans are designed to support adherence to treatment and viral load suppression to improve the health of people living with HIV/AIDS and prevent further transmission.

Viral load suppression is a key metric for SelectHealth, said Dr. Hany Abdelaal, president of VNSNY Choice Health Plans. SelectHealth has consistently hit high benchmarks for it, including 83% last year.

It also has had hepatitis C cure rates as high as 98%, which is comparable to those seen in clinical trial settings.

The model has proved itself in terms of cost, quality and overall satisfaction of members, Abdelaal said.

Working with community-based partners in addition to large health systems helps it meet its goals.

For example, Alliance for Positive Change has served as a community partner to SelectHealth's special needs plan for more than a decade, acting as the community arm of its member services department, said Sharen Duke, executive director and CEO of the alliance, in a statement provided to *Crain's*. "Alliance's peer navigators have become resource connectors and role models, supporting special needs plan members to access services and remain in care," she said.

Duke added that the alliance looks forward to working with VNSNY as the plan moves into Westchester and Long Island.

Overall, VNSNY said, the goals of the plan are aligned with Gov. Andrew Cuomo's Ending the Epidemic efforts, which are focused on preventing further transmission and supporting the wellness of people living with or at risk for HIV/AIDS.

A spokeswoman for the state Department of Health said in a statement provided to *Crain's* that the expansion "allows VNSNY to offer Medicaid members living in Nassau and Westchester counties the enhanced set of services."

Aside from VNSNY, Amida Care and MetroPlus Health Plan also offer HIV Medicaid special needs plans in the city.

The state Department of Health does not have any other service area expansion requests pending.
—Jennifer Henderson