



Holly Vossel, June 06, 2023

Compassus and VNS Health have formed a value-based collaboration aimed at improving access, awareness and quality of hospice and palliative care services.

The two home-based care organizations are joining forces in a Medicare Advantage (MA) Value-Based Insurance Design (VBID) model partnership. Through the collaboration, VNS Health and Compassus will help MA health plans to manage patient populations within the hospice component of VBID, often called the hospice carve-in.

The two organizations' similar approaches to end-of-life care delivery and quality improvement were a large part of the "genesis" that brought them together, according to Jordan Holland, vice president of value-based contracting at Compassus. The collaboration will allow both organizations to expand both the "depth" and "breadth" of hospice and palliative reach to patients within the value-based realm, he said.

"It certainly is a value-based collaboration," Holland told Hospice News. "What makes Compassus and VNS Health's pairing really unique is that both organizations have a significant history of focus on our care delivery models and our impact on patients' lives. The combination with VNS Health helps with their depth of experience not only as an MA plan themselves, but also as a hospice provider, along with our breadth of Compassus' footprint — we can really come together to address the unique issues and challenges that Medicare Advantage organizations have when it comes to managing end-of-life care for their patient populations."

The collaboration with VNS Health is intended to boost access to end-of-life care for serious and terminally ill patients by improving care coordination and transitions, Holland indicated. Compassus' role will largely involve providing community-based palliative and hospice support for patients in MA VBID health plans, he said.

Post-acute care provider Compassus is a portfolio company of the private equity firm Towerbrook Capital Partners and the health system Ascension Health. The Tennessee-based company offers community-based hospice, infusion therapy, home health and palliative care across 200 locations in 30 states.

"We've found that we have a really good complement of depth and breadth, and then we also have a really good pairing of focus of innovation and focus of patient experience that I think has created quite a good marriage when it comes to addressing opportunities with MA plans in this end-of-life care, VBID space," Holland said. "We at Compassus and VNS Health focus on what we can do to bring these hospice and palliative benefits to communities and better serve patients and their families. I think Medicare Advantage plans have the same charge and want the same things. At the end of the day, if we do it well together, we save overall total costs of care collectively."

VNS Health is among the largest nonprofit home-based care providers in the nation, serving close to 40,000 patients and health plan members.

The New York-based operator provides home health, hospice and palliative care, as well as behavioral health and personal care/private duty services. VNS Health's service region spans the New York City area, including four surrounding counties.

The collaboration is focused on making "significant, large-scale impacts" on hospice populations in VBID, according to Josie Aquino, director of product management at VNS Health.

"Our strategy is to shift care more upstream, initiating end-of-life discussions earlier, providing members with additional layers of support, and facilitating smoother transitions to hospice," Aquino told Hospice News in an email.

The two organizations will work closely with MA plans in the VBID space to enhance patient satisfaction and quality, extend hospice stays and broaden access to both palliative and hospice care, she said.

The hospice component of the value-based insurance design (VBID) model is now in its third year. Recently, the U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) [extended the demo](#) through 2030.

As of January, about 52 Medicare Advantage Organizations (MAOs) are participating in the VBID demonstration with a total of 9.3 million enrollees projected to participate in coming years, [reported](#) the U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). Of these, 15 are participating in the hospice component of the VBID model.

"Our new collaboration with Compassus is well-positioned to streamline the management of hospice beneficiaries, aiming to create a seamless care experience," Aquino said. "By integrating a continuum of care that addresses issues of access and health equity gaps, we have the opportunity to make significant improvements. Leveraging our combined expertise, we aim not only to succeed under the VBID

demonstration, but also to meet the demand for end-of-life solutions. This includes using our advanced analytic tool to ensure timely identification of members and appropriate placement into palliative care or hospice.”



Josie Aquino, director of product management, VNS Health. (Photo courtesy of VNS Health)

The organization last October planted deeper roots in value-based care with its affiliate, VNS Health Management Services Organization (MSO). The MSO arm developed a patient data analytics system, dubbed the VNS Health HELPS Tool that helps health plans navigate their members’ personal care needs in the home.

Through the collaboration, VNS Health is stretching the MSO’s tool capabilities into palliative and hospice, Aquino indicated.

“Inspired by our goal to expand VNS Health’s Management Services Organization nationwide, particularly to manage the hospice benefit under the VBID Hospice Benefit Component demonstration for other MA health plans, we sought a network partner with a similar mission, values, and a national presence,” she said. “This led to our collaboration with Compassus, where we found an immediate synergy. Leveraging our expertise in end-of-life care, sophisticated tools, and compassionate teams, we’re equipped to assist other MA plans in managing their members’ end-of-life needs.”

Hospice News is an online trade publication based in Chicago, covering the hospice care industry, reaching an audience of over 19,000.