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Op-ed: Home Health Care Is Vanishing— Your Grandmother is Paying the Price

By Dan Savitt



Imagine your grandmother falls, breaks her hip, and after surgery the hospital says she can go home—a relief for both Grandma and your family. Her doctor recommends Medicare home health care; a home health nurse to monitor her wounds and vitals, and an in-home physical therapist to help her build up strength and walk again.

Grandma wants to go home and the hospital needs the bed for another patient, but no home health agency can take the referral. Three days later your grandmother goes home without the care her doctor ordered.

Your family scrambles to provide care and keep her safe, changing dressings after work, juggling medications, and helping her with her exercises. But it's not enough. Grandma spikes a fever from an infected wound. She collapses, returns to the hospital with sepsis, and her recovery starts all over.

Scenarios like this are alarmingly common right now because across New York and the U.S, home health agencies are closing or shrinking.

Over the last seven years, New York has lost 29 agencies, leaving just 100 to serve the whole state, and Medicare home health admissions dropped by over 25%, according to data from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). That's more than 260,000 New Yorkers who should have had home health care but didn't. For example, in historically underserved neighborhoods like the Bronx, the decline is even more severe at 38%. Our families are suffering. And hospitals are overwhelmed.

Why is this happening? Since 2020, CMS has slashed home health reimbursements by 13%. Now it's proposing another 9% cut for next year. Agencies can't hire enough workforce for those who need care.

As trusted community providers serving New York, we see this crisis firsthand. Whether upstate or downstate, urban or rural, the story doesn't change: too many patients, not enough resources.

Consequences are dire: CMS data shows that seniors denied home health are 34% more likely to be re-hospitalized and 41% more likely to die. Not only is this tragic, it's costly: \$2,450 more, on average, (mostly added hospital costs). That's a price we ALL pay one way or another.

The evidence is clear—these cuts are having a profound effect on patients. CMS will decide next year's payment rates in a few weeks. Congress must press CMS to halt the reductions, reverse damage already done, and protect home health care access.

Most of New York's Congressional Delegation (Republicans and Democrats both) have already called on the Administration to stop the cuts. That's encouraging, but lawmakers, community leaders, and families must keep the pressure on.

Protecting Medicare home health care means protecting your family. It means reducing hospital overcrowding. It means keeping Medicare's promise to deliver care where people need it most—especially at home.

Dan Savitt is president and CEO of VNS Health, one of the largest nonprofit home- and community-based health care organizations in the U.S.