



## A Lifetime Building a Home in America's Melting Pot — and a Team Dedicated to Helping Her Stay There



*By Christine Chan, Senior Community Center Coordinator, VNS Health, Oct 24, 2023*

Times Square and Herald Square are among the busiest epicenters of New York City, but there's another true beating heart of the Big Apple a little further downtown—the bustling streets of Chinatown. As you walk to the [VNS Health](#) Chinatown Community Center where I work, at 7 Mott Street, you can see people of all ages, backgrounds and walks of life enjoying everything the city has to offer.

Its long-standing Chinese American community is one reason Chinatown is so vibrant, bringing all the diversity of China right to the streets of NYC and melding it with the many other cultures in our city. As I walk through the neighborhood, I see how so many residents are living out the American dream here and celebrating the many things that make Chinatown home—whether it's someone grabbing a quick skewer from a BBQ cart or a tasty rice-roll from a to-go restaurant, or families buying bags of fresh vegetables and seafood from one of the many neighborhood vendors.

At the same time, however, as many new Americans often tell us, moving to a new country is not easy. It takes courage and tenacity, and we can all use help from time to time.

As I write this, today is another busy day at our VNS Health Chinatown Community Center. One of our long-time members, Ching Wa Leong, has come early to meet with one of our team members. Ching is a soft-spoken but energetic woman who took an incredible journey to get to her home today. Growing up in mainland China, Ching and her husband knew they needed to seek a new life. Competitive swimmers, they trained for and made a perilous journey swimming from China to Hong Kong. Their incredible saga

did not end there. After marrying and having their first child together, they made the decision to seek a better life in the United States, immigrating to New York with little beyond what they had on their backs. Today, as a 40-plus-year resident of the city, Ching knows firsthand the challenges of building a new life and navigating health care and benefits in a new culture.

I first met Ching six years ago when she walked into our Community Center looking for help. When she came to us, she was feeling overwhelmed. While she was used to being self-sufficient and independent, always making her own way, family health challenges were now taking a toll. Her husband, who had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's, was experiencing increasingly deteriorating health, and Ching felt like she couldn't manage his condition all on her own. On top of everything, Ching and her husband speak little English and her children lived far away, so the mounting number of benefit letters and correspondence arriving in the mail was also stressful to manage. Still, as she has done all her life, Ching found courage deep within herself and was not afraid to admit she could use a helping hand with her husband's care. A former home health aide, she also understood from her own experience that support for a loved one when they are ill is not only essential for their health, but also for the health of family caregivers like Ching.

We knew it was important to Ching that she and her husband stay where they were most comfortable, as the two had already fought so hard to make New York their home. Chinatown was where they were happiest, going out for tea and dim sum early in the day, and then meeting up with friends in the park during sunny days. The prospect of uprooting their lives was scary, so we helped ensure they didn't have to. Our team, made up of social workers, clinicians, care managers, healthcare specialists and more, all fluent in Mandarin and Cantonese, were there to support Ching every step of the way. We helped connect her and her husband with a home health aide and nurses, and when she needed help parsing through complicated paperwork in English, she would walk into our center to get assistance from our social workers and volunteers. We also helped her enroll in a health plan that combines Medicare and Medicaid Managed Long Term Care benefits, designed for dual-eligible individuals who need ongoing help with activities of daily living in order to remain safely in their homes and communities.

Now, with a safety net in place, they had in-home care and respite for their family, and insurance to cover the increasing number of needed doctor visits. They suddenly faced a new challenge when Mr. Leong was diagnosed with advanced osteoporosis, on top of his Alzheimer's, and learned he would need costly bone marrow treatment. The couple discovered their plan not only could cover it, but it would not cost them a dime.



“Everyone here at the center has become like a second family,” Ching says. Always one to care for others, she now wants to share with others in the community the knowledge that asking for help can be the brave choice.

Ching’s bravery and generosity are emblematic of the many New Yorkers who have made great sacrifices to come to this country, and who now want to give back to the community. Here at the Chinatown Community Center, so much of what we do is inspired by those we serve like Ching, and by the joy that comes from lifting our neighbors up and placing value on the diversity of the community. After a helpful meeting at the center, Ching heads back home on the busy streets she has known for so long, returning to the place that has been, and will remain...her home.

*For more information on VNS Health, including the VNS Health Chinatown Community Centers and Health Plans, visit [www.vnshealth.org](http://www.vnshealth.org)*

***Patch is a hyperlocal news platform in more than 1,200 communities nationwide. With nearly 1 million monthly page views, Patch NYC’s page views are among the highest in the network.***