

## Mental Health Facility Expansion Gets Support from Community Board 1



Diana Escamilla Fuentes , Nov 28, 2023

It was a successful afternoon for [VNS Health](#), previously known as Visiting Nurse Service of New York, as all nine members of a Community Board 1's Health & Human Services and Seniors committee voted to recommend that the full board write a letter of support to the [NYC Office of Mental Health](#), for expansion of a treatment center in Melrose.

On Nov. 14, the committee voted to support the VNS Health plan's proposed expansion to provide assessment and treatment for residents with substance use disorder.

The VNS Health proposal calls for treatments that will include "psychotherapy, substance use disorder counseling, peer services support, medication, crisis intervention, and complex care coordination," as well as a successful "discharge/transition" services.

Services would be provided at an integrated treatment center at the FRIENDS Building on 489-493 East 153rd Street. The center already offers help to Bronx residents with mental illnesses.

As of now, VNS Health offers 34 programs across the city. In the South Bronx, the FRIENDS building is an epicenter for behavioral health services for children and adults.

"We're gonna be open after 5 p.m., we're gonna be open on weekends, which we already are, and we're gonna service the adolescent population, which I know there's a big need here, for how do we help our adolescents," said Patricia Kissi, director of treatment at VNS Health.

The new services will target teens and their families regardless of legal status or ability to pay. VNS Health accepts Medicaid and other types of insurance, and for those who lack insurance, government grants will cover the expenses.

VNS Health recently received a \$4 million, four-year, grant from the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#). VNS Health said that, at most, \$25,000 of the grant will go toward minimal facility renovations and the rest will go toward treatment for those in need.

“We really are centered and focused on the youth,” said Kissi. “We want to be able to develop their self esteem, help them set future goals, help them have the ability to achieve them without the substance abuse piece or the mental piece being a barrier to what they want to do in their lives.”

The committee’s recommendation for a letter of support is set to be voted on by the full Community Board 1 at its Nov. 30 meeting.

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