Mission

To help people in our communities live healthier and more secure lives through access to high quality, affordable health care.

Vision

To be recognized and valued as THE community and business resource for health care security through financial strength, effective cost control, ease of use, and commitment to health improvement.
There are two parts to our annual report of caring theme. The first is “do.” It’s an action verb that requires we perform a task, achieve an objective or accomplish a goal. “Right thing” is the second part. Right as in correct, appropriate or honorable.

We believe doing the right thing is the essence of our nonprofit company’s mission: To help people in our communities live healthier and more secure lives through access to high-quality, affordable health care.

As a health plan, we do that in a variety of ways. For example, we partner with and provide financial support to other local organizations as they help people at all stages in their lives—from teaching children and teens healthy habits to helping seniors remain independent and active. We offer case management for babies in the NICU and their families, build relationships with Medicare members, and raise public awareness about choosing health care services wisely and taking medications as directed. We also collaborate with providers to improve patient outcomes and share clinical and financial responsibilities.

As a provider of health care services, we offer unique programs that address not only patients’ medical needs, but also their emotional and social concerns. We take care of patients in their homes, assisting them with activities of daily living, and we provide comfort and palliative care to others. Our long-term care insurance clients—whether they
live in upstate New York or across the country—have access to personal care advisors who are only a phone call away. Clients of our benefits administration company get reminders about important medical tests appropriate to their age and gender and have a resource for support for their medical problems.

These are just a few examples of how we fulfill our mission. While many of our nearly 6,000 employees have direct contact with those we serve, others are behind the scenes supporting their efforts. We all work toward a common goal of doing right by our customers and communities because it’s the right thing to do.

Chris Booth, President and CEO of The Lifetime Healthcare Companies
Ensuring our littlest members get the best start in life
Babies born too soon or sick may spend days, weeks or even months in a neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) so they can get strong and go home. Even after they leave, they may need extra attention and care at home to ensure they grow and thrive.

Imagine having three little ones in the NICU at once. When Rebecca Anderson-Pickering gave birth to triplets prematurely Jan. 18, 2015, she and her husband, Chuck Pickering, kept the road hot between their home in Navarino and Crouse Hospital’s NICU in Syracuse.

Only twice during that cold, snowy winter were they unable to visit Charlie, Corey and Lilly. Corey was the first to come home after eight weeks, followed by Lilly at nine weeks, and Charlie, six days later. Rebecca took four months off from her dental practice in Skaneateles; Chuck, three months from his job with Mack Studios in Auburn.

The babies, who each weighed less than three pounds at birth, received good care in Crouse’s NICU and have an excellent pediatrician, said Rebecca.

Yet, when the Pickerings have a question about care they forgot to ask at a doctor’s appointment or an issue they need immediate help with, they have another resource, a ProgenyHealth case manager.

Excellus BCBS and Univera Healthcare contract with the case management company to help our newest members get the best in evidence-based care in the NICU. It’s the only case management company in the country devoted exclusively to newborns who are born prematurely and/or have complex medical conditions and their families. ProgenyHealth’s neonatologists, pediatricians and NICU nurses provide continuity of care in partnership with NICU providers.

Christine Welker, R.N., Care Coordinator at Crouse Hospital, said that the relationship between the hospital and ProgenyHealth is collaborative. “It’s nice because we’re all on the same page regarding the level of care.”

And, that’s good for families because they know their baby is getting the appropriate level of care. Because the hospital and our Health Plan are in sync, charges are billed correctly, assuring families that their bills are taken care of.

CompassionNet is a pediatric and perinatal palliative care program available to Excellus BCBS and Univera Healthcare members who have a child under the age of 21 with a potentially life-threatening illness or medical condition. Our affiliate, Lifetime Care, administers CompassionNet; the interdisciplinary team works closely with families, providers, specialists and hospital staff regarding a child’s illness, goals and care. We collaborate with the medical community and other local resources to help sustain families during their most trying times.

Our team’s focus on the entire family and each member’s quality of life makes this a unique program of care that goes “above and beyond” what other insurers offer.

The team includes case managers, child life specialists, social workers, nurses, pediatric nurse practitioners, and certified palliative care pediatricians. Home and community-based services, such as counseling and expressive therapies, extend beyond the team, building a wider “net” of support. In addition, CompassionNet helps families navigate the logistical challenges that arise when coping with illness, as well as providing bereavement counseling and support when needed.
Within 48 hours of notification, ProgenyHealth begins case management services. The Pickering babies were born before the Health Plan partnered with ProgenyHealth last March. Soon after the partnership began, ProgenyHealth began managing the Pickering case. As of Dec. 1, 2015, ProgenyHealth has helped manage care for 268 members’ babies placed in a NICU.

ProgenyHealth case managers provide additional support for families when baby goes home until he or she turns 1.

If a baby is re-admitted to the hospital before his or her first birthday, ProgenyHealth continues to manage the case. Thereafter, if he or she requires more care, ProgenyHealth transfers case management to our Health Plan. Seriously ill children or those with chronic conditions are eligible for our Health Plan’s CompassionNet program. (See previous page.)

“Our affiliation with ProgenyHealth ensures that our NICU babies get care based on best practices,” said Theresa Jermyn, Utilization Management Supervisor for our Health Plan.

“We see it as a win-win for everyone.”

Case managers help babies and families in the NICU and at home

When do case managers first get involved with the baby and family?

We call the family within 48 hours of receiving the case and then every two weeks while their baby is in the NICU. We want to make sure the family has transportation and baby supplies and to notify them about our services, including appointments with a lactation consultant. We answer their questions about their baby’s growth and development and the NICU process. We provide emotional support and referrals to social services and community resources. We also confer with the discharge planner and social workers to make sure the family’s needs are being met and their future needs identified.

How is the case manager involved when the babies go home?

Once the baby goes home, we do a full needs assessment that includes home safety, doctor appointments, medications, durable medical equipment needs, current illness (if any), feeding, the family’s financial situation, mother’s mental health and family support. Around the same time as the baby’s appointments with the pediatrician, we call the family for updates, answer questions and provide information about growth and development. If parents have questions before the next scheduled outreach call, they can contact our on-call RNs who are available 24/7.
We help parents make appointments, get referrals and keep track of doctor visits. With every outreach, we review developmental milestones, and if baby is not reaching them, we can refer the family for early intervention or other services. We also provide tips for how parents can help their babies with language, cognitive and physical development.

We review feedings and ensure that baby is getting what he or she needs for proper growth and nutrition.

We answer parents’ questions about their baby’s illnesses, if any, and assist them if their baby develops problems. We will call the pediatrician to discuss issues we feel he or she should be aware of. We verify that the baby receives his/her immunizations on time and attends doctor appointments. After reviewing baby’s medications, we go over side effects and make sure that the parents not only have the supplies for administering them, but also are comfortable doing so.

With every contact, we assess the parents’ mental health and coping skills; if needed, we’ll direct them to the appropriate resources.

“Parents are assured their newborns are getting the best start in life, and we know that they’re getting the most effective care at the appropriate level. We all want the same thing: a healthy baby.” Theresa Jermyn, Utilization Management Supervisor

ProgenyHealth Case Manager Kate Wesztergom, R.N. B.S.N., answers questions about services for babies in the NICU and their families.

How else do you help families with their newborn’s care?

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What are some typical concerns or questions?

Parents often look for reassurance that they’re doing the right things for their babies. They may ask about when to call the pediatrician, when to begin solid foods, about sleeping patterns, how to develop routines, age-appropriate development, about immunizations and medications and how to contact their insurance company about benefits or billing.

We encourage parents to ask us anything; if we don’t know the answers, we’ll find them. We’re here to educate and help parents, and we LOVE what we do!
By sharing information from The Choosing Wisely® campaign, our Health Plan in is helping educate the public about how to improve the quality of their care and at the same time reduce the use of unnecessary services that have little or no proven benefit.

The physician-led Choosing Wisely initiative is a product of the ABIM Foundation. More than 70 medical societies have contributed 400-plus care recommendations for Choosing Wisely.

“Our goal is to provide consumers with tools that promote shared decision-making between themselves and their doctors,” said Dr. Matthew Bartels, Medical Director for Health Care Improvement.

Excellus BCBS and Univera Health-care are two of just a few health plans across the country that Consumer Reports has licensed to distribute content on Choosing Wisely. In July, we produced an infographic advising mothers against early elective deliveries as part of Choosing Wisely and then one about why most people don’t have a medical reason for vitamin D testing. These were the first two in a series of infographics in our Choosing Wisely campaign that highlight specific recommendations.

“With Choosing Wisely, doctors are encouraged to initiate open and honest conversations about options for care, tests and procedures, so that the treatment ultimately chosen is evidence-based, doesn’t duplicate other tests or procedures, is safe and is truly necessary,” said Dr. Bartels.
Championing a good cause

In Syracuse last summer, we handed out capes and pill minders at a Chiefs baseball game and the New York State Fair to spread the word about the importance of taking medications as directed. According to a World Health Organization report, patients’ failure to take medications correctly is the No. 1 problem in treating illness today. In addition, we set a world record for the most people wearing TAD (Take As Directed) superhero capes and doing the wave at a Rochester Red Wings baseball game in 2014.

ACQA partnerships good for patients, providers and payers

Accountable Cost and Quality Arrangements are collaborations between providers and payers that not only aim to improve patient outcomes, but also serve as an incentive to share financial and clinical responsibilities for patients. Benefits of forming ACQAs include improved health status of our members and communities, lower health care spending and financial security for our health care provider partners. To ensure that savings are tied to quality standards, ACQA providers must improve care coordination and deliver appropriate, safe and timely care. Excellus BCBS has ACQAs with The Greater Rochester Independent Practice Association, the University of Rochester Medical Center, St. Joseph’s Health and Crouse Hospital in Syracuse and the Bassett Healthcare Network based in Cooperstown.
Not feeling good and/or being in pain affects employees’ productivity and morale. Companies that take extra steps to improve their employees’ health find that it can positively affect their bottom line, too.

Our BlueHealth Guidance program helps employees whose health problems account for the majority of an employer’s utilization of claims or identifies prevalent conditions among the workforce that may drive up health care costs.

The enhanced care management program uses predictive modeling and claims data to pinpoint where help is needed most, i.e., it targets the 5 percent of members who drive approximately 50 percent of a group’s costs. BlueHealth Guidance Plus manages 7 percent of the employee population that may be responsible for 60 percent to 70 percent of a company’s health care costs.

A dedicated registered nurse serves as a single point of contact for the group. He or she leads a team of dedicated licensed clinicians, including a pharmacist, behavioral health specialist and a health and wellness consultant.

“Specifically, we identify and manage employees who use a disproportionate share of health care services or who are at risk for developing expensive conditions,” said Dr. Matthew Bartels, Medical Director for Health Care Improvement.

For example, one BlueHealth Guidance case manager worked with an employee who had components of metabolic syndrome, including diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity. In conjunction with the woman’s primary doctor, the case manager supported her through multiple changes to her diabetes and blood pressure medications and lifestyle adaptations to eat healthier foods and begin exercising. The member has lost more than 20 pounds, and her blood pressure and diabetes are more controlled. She reports not only feeling better and more positive, but also as having a better relationship with her doctor.

The case manager may also identify a prevalent condition—such as back pain—among a company’s employees. In that case, he or she may arrange for group presentations about how to manage or prevent back pain and medication options. He or she also may work with individuals who have chronic back pain. For example, one employee, despite having multiple doctors involved in his treatment plan, had uncontrolled pain that affected his mood and day-to-day activity. Working with the employee’s primary doctor to get second opinions, the case manager helped the member get a new treatment plan that has resulted in an 80 percent decrease in pain and a much improved quality of life.

“What’s good for employees is good for their employer.”

“The introduction of a dedicated coach as part of Excellus BlueCross BlueShields’ BlueHealth Guidance Program has truly been a great addition to the benefits we provide to our employees. They now have a single person they can speak to regarding their health goals or disease management, someone who knows their individual situation and can tailor coaching sessions directly to their needs,” said Heather Schmidtka, Human Resources Manager for Barrett Paving Materials New York Central Region located in upstate New York.

“Our coach, Julie,* is available days, nights and weekends and never rushes you off the phone. She makes sure to answer all of your questions, and she is available as little or as often as the individual would like to speak.”

Not only are Barrett employees eligible for the program, but also their covered spouses and dependents. One spouse was in so much back pain she didn’t know what to do until she contacted Julie.

* Julie Brezina, R.N., C.C.M.
“She saved my life. I had tried everything to relieve the pain without success. After working with Julie, I had a back fusion. I’m not in chronic pain anymore. It brings tears to my eyes when I think of how Julie has helped me. We still stay in touch. She keeps me on the right path to taking better care of myself.”

For one of the companies in the program, our case manager engaged 160 members of 257 referred to the program in a year. The number of contacts she made per member ranged from one to 35 for a total of 835 member engagements. The case manager can flex her hours to meet the needs of employees who may work outside of normal business hours.

“Our enhanced case management program is a win-win for all,” said Julie. “Because employees feel better, they’re generally more productive. Companies have healthier, happier employees and lower health care costs.”

“It’s reassuring that we have someone who is knowledgeable in a vast array of health and medical related situations, and if she doesn’t know the answers, she finds them.”

Heather Schmidtka, Human Resources Manager for Barrett Paving Materials

Our BlueHealth Guidance Program targets

- 5% of members
- 50% of group’s cost

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Fitting back into everyday life can be difficult for military personnel who have been deployed overseas, experienced enemy fire or sat with friends injured while fighting in Iraq or Afghanistan.

That’s where the Clear Path for Veterans Warrior Wellness Workshops come in. An Excellus BCBS Community Health Award helps to fund the workshops.

Clear Path for Veterans volunteers and peer mentors reach out across an 18-county service area to connect with more than 14,000 post-9/11 veterans; the majority reside in rural communities. Those who have adjustment disorder symptoms are invited to participate in a day-long Warrior Wellness Workshop.

Each Warrior Wellness Workshop is held at the Clear Path for Veterans headquarters in Chittenango, situated on a ridge overlooking Oneida Lake.

Following introductions and morning refreshments, Chef Adam Coleman conducts an interactive session on nutrition, food choices, fresh foods and healthy cooking. Participants are encouraged to use the healthy cooking skills at home and pick strawberries or pumpkins on the organization’s farm.

Before lunch, a variety of speakers provides participants with self-care and wellness information.

After lunch, Char Marx, Clear Path for Veterans’ Health and Wellness Director and an Army veteran, introduces participants to the Wellness Wing, where they can try various integrative medicine modalities that have been shown to reduce pain and anxiety and improve sleep.

Licensed or certified practitioners offer veterans 30-minute practice sessions. Participants can try acupuncture, Reiki, polarity breathing, mindfulness, walking, meditation and/or yoga.

During the afternoon quiet time, veterans can write in their journals and/or meet as a group for reflection and discussion.

The goals of the Warrior Wellness Workshops are to encourage veterans to make healthier choices about food, exercise, relaxation and the self-care and wellness behaviors that will help them readjust to civilian life, said Char. They are aligned with goals set by the Department of Veterans Affairs to help veterans make positive and meaningful changes when they return from service.

“Using the Wellness Wing at Clear Path for Veterans has helped me tremendously,” said Brian Knapp, a Clear Path for Veterans peer mentor and Marine veteran, who uses integrative medicine to help him alleviate pain and stress.

“The wellness program is both relaxing and rejuvenating,” said another Clear Path for Veterans peer mentor, Navy veteran Venecia DeRoose.

“My job as a peer mentor can be very demanding, but whenever I’m stressed, I make an appointment and head down to the Wellness Wing. At the end of my treatment, I feel like I’ve slept a full eight hours.”

“Because of organizations like Excellus BlueCross BlueShield, Clear Path for Veterans will further help our veterans integrate into our communities, lead healthier lives and enjoy an improved sense of well-being.”

Char Marx, Clear Path for Veterans’ Health and Wellness Director
Clear Path for Veterans helps vets readjust to civilian life.

Venecia DeRoose, Clear Path for Veterans peer mentor.
“Mom, I can see all the trees.”
Despite a vision check in the pediatrician’s office last year, the doctor’s staff did not identify George Martone’s lazy eye. During an Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (ABVI) screening at his day care center last year, the four-year-old’s compromised eyesight was detected. ABVI referred George to a specialist, who has worked with him to correct the problem.

“He now wears glasses, and it’s made a huge difference,” said George’s mom, Lisa Martone of Penfield.

“We were driving through the mountains of South Carolina recently, and he kept saying, ‘Mom, I can see all the trees.’

“I’m very appreciative of the program,” she added. “They really helped his vision and the overall support of ABVI was just wonderful.”

Excellus BCBS helps support ABVI’s Early Vision Screening program for children ages six months to 5-years-old with a grant.

“Vision loss in preschool-aged children threatens their ability to learn how to read and develop to their full potential,” said Kimberly Lawrence, ABVI’s Coordinator for Vision Wellness and Preventive Services.

“Parents and teachers of children struggling in school may pinpoint them as having a learning disability when they’re actually having problems seeing.”

The Early Vision Screening program is often more effective than one performed in a doctor’s office because it requires minimal response from the child, said Kimberly. Unlike traditional screening methods, such as reading from an alphabet chart or picture cards, the program uses a machine to photograph a child’s eyes. ABVI screened 2,000 children last year.

On average, 20 percent of children do not pass the screening. When this happens, ABVI gives parents a list of local eye doctors who see children younger than 5 and recommends they schedule an appointment. This program has helped identify eyes turning in or out, cataracts, tumors and the simple need for glasses.

Excellus BCBS has also issued grants to other programs in the Rochester community that help individuals who have disabilities.
Using their eyes, ears, nose, hands and tongues, children in the Family Enrichment Network (FEN) in Binghamton and their adult caregivers are learning how to make healthy nutrition and activity choices.

Last September, FEN introduced EatPlayGrow™, a new early childhood health curriculum developed in partnership with the National Institutes of Health.

The Family Enrichment Center has implemented EatPlayGrow in all of its child care resource and referral programs. Excellus BCBS helps to underwrite the program.

Recent studies show that day care providers typically serve preschoolers highly processed, high-fat, high-sugar foods because they may not know about or understand healthy eating practices. Other reasons include cultural preferences for low-nutrition foods and inadequate time and resources to prepare home cooked meals from fresh produce.

EatPlayGrow uses art, storytelling, music and movement to make educational lessons fun and hands-on, stressing the importance of making positive choices regarding nutrition, physical activity and sleep, said Linda Miller, FEN Program Coordinator.
"It’s amazing to see the children so excited to learn about their five senses and how they experience the world with them," said Michelle Schneider, a family home care provider.

“They’re excited to try new foods and learn about healthy eating,” she added.

Recently, Linda has been training day care providers and teachers how to implement the curriculum and administer pre-assessments to measure nutrition knowledge and physical activity levels. Upon completion of the training, each program participant receives the tool kit, including the curriculum, activity guide, parent handouts, children’s books, and supplies needed to implement activities. At the end of the school year, each participant will be assessed to determine the program’s success.

“Eating habits are learned behaviors; they’re not intuitive. So what children learn to eat at home early in life sticks with them well into adulthood,” Linda said.
More than a decade ago, Utica resident Patrick Johnson noticed that young African-American males were both the perpetrators and victims of gun violence locally and across the nation.

“This was destroying our families and neighborhoods,” said Patrick. In response, he founded Hoops & Dreams “to give everyone, regardless of who they are, new hope.”

Over the past 13 years, the Hoops & Dreams Project has helped youth in Utica’s inner city develop life skills for solving problems without turning to violence.

“Two many of our young people and even adults, Hoops & Dreams means everything because of the positive energy and hope it gives to people who are often down and out,” said Patrick.

In addition to twice-annual basketball tournaments in January and July, the Hoops & Dreams Project runs a summer basketball league for students ages 12 to 18. Three times a week, kids get together in a safe environment to play competitive ball, while also building skills off the court.

The summer league includes sessions that address:
- understanding the value of a good education
- taking care of your body, mind and spirit
- avoiding teen pregnancy
- preventing drug and alcohol use
- improving race relations
- building career skills
- managing emotions

The goal is to provide tools that will keep youth on the right track and high-risk neighborhoods safe, said Patrick.

Over the years, through engagement of law enforcement and fire department personnel, the Hoops & Dreams Project has helped build bridges between the local protection agencies and the black community, he said.

Patrick credits much of the program’s success to ongoing financial support from companies such as Excellus BCBS.

“Getting support from a major company like Excellus BlueCross BlueShield gives us street cred, putting us on the map in a whole new light. It lets this community know that the Hoops & Dreams Project is serious about ending gun violence in the city of Utica and Oneida County,” he said.

“Most importantly, it means endless possibilities for many who were all but ready to throw in the towel. It lights a fire that says, ‘Don’t give up. Keep going.’”

Patrick Johnson, Hoops & Dreams Project Founder
Hoops & Dreams gives hope to Utica youth
Baby Café serves moms and their newborns
I feel at home here and at ease,” said Augusta, a mother of three young boys, describing how she feels when she’s at Durham’s Central City Baby Café in downtown Buffalo.

“It’s a place where I can let my shoulders down, knowing that it’s not just me, but that there are other moms going through the same things I am.”

Durham’s Central City Baby Café is not a restaurant or diner, but rather a place where expectant mothers and new moms can get information that will help them in their role as parents. In particular, participants learn about the importance of breastfeeding.

Opening in 2013 as the first Baby Café of its kind in New York state, the site is based on the internationally recognized Baby Café program where women stop by to share experiences and meet with certified lactation counselors. Durham Memorial AME Zion Church operates the Durham’s Central City Baby Café with support from a Univera Healthcare Community and Member Health Improvement grant.

Univera Healthcare’s grant program targets underserved segments of the community to enhance quality of life and health status. Programs that receive grant funds must have specific objectives and measurable outcomes.

Baby Café staff helps moms-to-be create a birthing plan, offers doula support, if requested, and provides ongoing support after the child is born. The Baby Café also hosts presentations by community partners, who instruct new mothers in CPR, emergency preparation, first aid and domestic violence issues.

“I think one of the major benefits of coming to the Baby Café is being able to talk with other moms about breastfeeding and my experience with it,” said Augusta, adding that through the program she became a certified lactation counselor.

“Just being able to talk about things that we’re going through as moms and as parents has taught me that while we’re different on the outside, we’re very similar on the inside,” she said.

“That’s helped us feel more at ease as parents, and that’s a big deal.”

“I’ve learned from the mothers and their babies who have passed through our program that moms do better when they know better.”

Rev. Diann Holt, Baby Café Director
Once afraid to leave home, Wanda now wants to travel, thanks to her medical team.
When you’re experiencing medical problems or really any kind of difficulty in life, it usually helps to have someone in your corner. If one person is good to have, then having a team is even better. Lifetime Health Medical Group patient Wanda Keten recently found out.

In her early 70s, Wanda has several medical issues. Crohn’s disease, in particular, was affecting her quality of life. Due to complications using a colostomy bag, Wanda recalled when she was afraid to leave the house. The risk for an embarrassing situation—such as the bag leaking or exploding—was just too great.

“I didn’t want to go outside,” she said.

Luckily, she didn’t need to face her colostomy or Crohn’s disease alone. Behind her stood a health care team from Lifetime’s Wilson practice: Dr. Zhong Guo, an internal medicine physician, Sherianne Buehler, a licensed clinical social worker, and Ann Sharp, R.N., her care manager.

Wanda became a patient at Wilson in 2013. Before she started seeing Dr. Guo, she took approximately two dozen medications. He helped Wanda cut her medication regimen in half. Soon she was linked up with the other professionals on her Lifetime Health care team, including Ann from the Population Health Management team and Sherianne, a Behavioral Health Care Coordinator in Lifetime’s IMPACT (Improving Mood: Promoting Access to Collaborative Treatment) program.

Taking the lead to help Wanda with her multiple medical issues, Ann connected her with a nurse practitioner in the community who specializes in colostomy bags.

“Ann advocated for me,” said Wanda. “She was there for me.”

Ann also provided Wanda with a book to help her understand her disease and obtained approval for surgery she needed.

“Ann was instrumental in my recovery,” said Wanda, adding that she appreciates the care she received from Dr. Guo and Sherianne, too.

Sherianne became involved in Wanda’s care through IMPACT, a new program with a collaborative team approach to improve the overall health and well-being of adults. She helped Wanda work through personal challenges, giving her techniques to change situations she wasn’t happy with.

“Thank God for those good doctors and the nurses, because they were very patient and took a lot of time with me,” says Wanda. “They went beyond their jobs. I’m glad that I got connected with them.”

Now that she feels confident to go out in public, Wanda plans to visit her brother in Texas.

“I’m ready to travel now.”
When Ruby Sawyer’s mother was receiving hospice care through Lifetime Care, then known as Genesee Region Home Care, the nurses asked her if she had ever considered working with hospice patients.

“You do such a good job caring for your mother,” they told her.

Five months after her mother’s passing, Ruby applied to become an aide. She started as a caregiver for hospice patients and has been a home health aide with Lifetime Care for 17 years.

One of the patients she cares for is Vivian Heffernan, who resides in an independent living complex in Rochester. Vivian moved there three years ago from the family home where she raised four children. The assisted living center has many amenities that offer a welcome change from the stress of maintaining a home. Vivian enjoys exercising in the pool with other residents, strolling along the grounds and sitting on the balcony to enjoy the sun.

Although she’s 91, Vivian is in good health, which she attributes to “no operations to slow me down.” Family members pitch in to provide extra support, but found they could not do it all. A few months ago, they engaged Home Care Plus, the licensed agency that is part of Lifetime Care, to help Vivian with bathing and preparing meals. The agency also provides services that include feeding, dressing, dispensing medications, toileting and getting around.

Ruby provides care for Vivian two hours a day, three days a week. “I count on Ruby to get me up,” said Viv, adding, “the other days are my reclining days.”

Ruby makes Viv’s breakfast and lunch and preps dinner before she leaves. Other days, Viv has access to numerous meal options through the independent living facility.

Viv says things are easier now that Ruby has gotten to know her and they have developed a routine. Viv especially enjoys Ruby’s assistance with bathing because it feels luxurious and makes her feel pampered.

“She helps me in the shower, gets me my robe, and rubs lotion on my skin when I’m done,” said Viv.

Vivian’s daughter, Pat, feels that Ruby’s assistance has made a huge difference for her mother. She has noticed improvement in Viv’s skin quality as a result of the regular shower and shampoo and believes her mother’s overall health has benefitted from the nutritious meals Ruby prepares. It’s a relief, she said, knowing her mother is getting the extra care, and if she needs more help, it’s available.

For Ruby, caregiving is a labor of love. “Working with the families is very fulfilling. They say I give them a lot, but it’s given me a lot, too.”
Caregiving is a labor of love.
Medicare STAR Outreach Team makes personal connection with Medicare members

We brought a group of Medicare-eligible people together in Rochester last fall to ask two things: how old are you and how old do you feel? Not surprisingly, most people on average feel about 12 years younger than they really are. We designed our Medicare Advantage plans to help seniors feel better than ever, provide the benefits they want and achieve more of what’s important to them. Mary Waltz of Rochester feels a spry 51-years-old.
Medicare Service

Coordinators Scott Lemmer and Phil Fielding spend their work days talking with our Medicare members. Both men say they love their jobs. Some calls they initiate; others they respond to. Calls last from five minutes to more than an hour.

“Building relationships is what we do,” Scott said.

“We’re our members’ advocates,” Phil said.

The two men are part of the Medicare STAR outreach team that includes two Clinical Pharmacists, Alyssa Pignato and Jeffrey Ledgerwood. Phil and Scott make outbound calls to contact members regarding plan satisfaction and experience. If something is bothering a member, they ask what they can do to make it right. They remind members about plan benefits, including preventive care and vaccinations, many without copays.

Scott and Phil also remove obstacles to care, such as transportation issues, by providing members with a list of local resources.

After the call, they send the member a letter and include a business card with their personal 800 number.

Phil recalls one woman who was speechless when he answered the phone and asked how he could assist her.

“It was like she didn’t believe I really wanted to help her,” he said. When he discovered that some of her claims were pending, he followed up to see what was needed to get them paid.

Scott remembers a woman who called to tell him that his signature reminded her of her late husband’s excellent penmanship.

Connecting with members and making them feel that someone cares is important, said Phil.

So is empathy. Scott convinced one reluctant member to have a bone scan after he found common ground with the man’s military service and his own grandfather’s stint in the Marines.

In a pilot program, our Health Plan offers in-home bone scans to members whose claims data indicates they’ve had a recent fracture. In conjunction with our home health care agency, Lifetime Care, the procedure is done at the member’s convenience and requires only a quick scan of the heel using a handheld wand. Lifetime Care transmits the results to the member’s doctor for follow-up.

Alyssa and Jeffrey deal with members’ medication adherence, high risk medications and comprehensive medication review.

They get positive feedback about their thorough review of prescription medications and over-the-counter supplements. Many members take a number of medications that not only can be overwhelming, but also costly.

“We help patients understand their medication regimen and educate them about the benefits as well as risks of what they’re taking. This empowers them to be involved in their health care and may improve the overall quality of their lives,” said Alyssa.

“Our members think of us as their second pharmacist. We’re always available to review and optimize their medication therapy,” added Jeffrey.

Each year, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services issues a star rating for each Medicare plan based on how well the Medicare Advantage Plan meets members’ needs. In 2015 and for 2016, CMS awarded four of five stars to our Medicare PPO and HMO plans. Our Medicare Prescription Drug Plan garnered 4.5 stars.

“We aim to be a five-star Medicare Advantage Plan,” said Mary Kate Hull, Medicare Stars Project Manager. “First and foremost, we want this for our members because it means we are providing quality service at the highest level. It also makes us more competitive in the marketplace.

“Our Medicare STAR outreach team is making a significant difference in our members’ lives,” she continued.

“We have our members’ backs,” said Scott.

Phil added, “We want our members to feel that they matter.”
Almost everyone wishes they had medical personnel in the family they could turn to when they have a health question and their doctor is unavailable. Approximately 30,000 Lifetime Benefit Solutions members—as part of the company’s Steps to Success program that Corporate Care Management administers—have the next best thing: Katie Burnham, R.N., Comprehensive Wellness Director.

Katie, along with other CCM staff, alerts members to prevention screenings related to Pap tests, mammograms, prostate cancer and colorectal cancer. They target members who have not had the screenings and encourage them to talk with their doctors about which tests are specific for them, given their age and gender.

Often Katie is the reassuring voice on the other end of the phone with sound health advice for what ails members at that moment in time. She not only counsels them about gaps in care, but also reminds them to check with their personal physician.

One member recalled Katie recommending that she make an appointment with a podiatrist when she said she was having difficulty with one of her feet and was afraid she had the beginnings of neuropathy. Katie mentioned that she was aware that the member had had a recent mammogram and colonoscopy.

“She thanked me for completing the tests and being proactive,” the member said, adding that Katie’s letters remind her to go to the doctor.

One member woke up disoriented, sweating with high blood sugar and unable to reach her pocketbook where she had sugar packets. When she spoke to Katie shortly after, the registered nurse and certified chronic health care coach suggested that she keep sugar packets in her night stand for easy access and to have her husband call an ambulance if her blood sugar gets that high again. Katie also advised her to discuss her episodes with her doctor at her next visit and to have a healthy snack before going to bed. “I hope I don’t have this experience again, but I value Katie’s opinion.”

For another member who has diabetes, Katie recommended some websites with healthy recipes. She also advised the member to find a doctor through Lifetime Benefit Solutions because she had not had a Pap test or mammogram in a number of years.

A stressed-out daughter caring for her 94-year-old mother found herself constantly juggling so many tasks that her own health suffered.

“My blood sugar is sometimes as high as 300. Katie and I discussed ways to avoid having this problem by just eating a protein snack,” said the daughter.

“Katie and I developed a plan to bring my sugar levels down to a normal basis. She was very kind and took the time to listen to me and my concerns. Thanks for the program and for her.”
Near or far away, clients come first with MedAmerica’s Personal Care Advisors

**Personal Care**

MedAmerica Personal Care Advisor (PCA) Annette LaFica loves helping people in their time of need. She is especially fond of working with elderly citizens.

“There is so much you can learn by talking with them,” said Annette, a licensed practical nurse who graduated from the Rochester School of Practical Nursing. She also holds an associate’s degree in business administration.

Annette believes MedAmerica’s personal service makes the company stand out from other long-term care insurance (LTCI) carriers. She recalled one claimant, a woman in her 90s who had dementia. The woman’s family lived in New Jersey, making it difficult for them to determine if their loved one in Florida was receiving the care she needed. The family contacted Annette for help.

“There were a lot of red flags that led us to believe she wasn’t being cared for properly,” Annette reported.

“She hadn’t been to a doctor in two or three years, and her caregiver was borderline negligent,” she continued.

As a result of Annette’s intervention, the family replaced the caregiver with home health aides from a licensed agency, and the woman began seeing her doctor on a regular basis.

“Her family feels more at ease knowing that she is getting the support she needs,” said Annette.

“MedAmerica is there to assist our insureds one-on-one,” Annette continued. “It’s that kind of personal touch that ensures they are getting what they need and deserve. It shows that MedAmerica really cares.”

When it came time to design a new LTCI product, CareDirections® Contego, the MedAmerica team focused on the strength of its Personal Care Advisors.

“We thought about the difference we make in the lives of our policyholders and their families and that’s what we built Contego on,” says Tricia Burnett, MedAmerica Director of Marketing and Communications.

Contego, a Latin term which means to cover, shield, protect and defend, contains several key benefits that other LTCI policies do not, Tricia explained.

“For example, every Contego policy will waive the premium when a policyholder begins using his or her benefits, eliminating financial pressure when the claimant and his or her family are dealing with a lot of stress and uncertainty,” she said.

MedAmerica President Bill Naylon emphasized the spirit of the PCAs behind the company’s newest offering, available in 47 states.

“We believe it is critically important to protect our insureds and their families by providing both the financial protection they need during a long-term care event, as well as the comprehensive, caring support and individualized attention our PCAs offer. With Contego and the continued work of our team, we can do that.”

MedAmerica President Bill Naylon
Our Health Plan is ahead of its time regarding end-of-life care

As of Jan. 1, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services began reimbursing physicians for providing end-of-life care advice to their patients.

The Health Plan’s Dr. Patricia Bomba, Vice President and Medical Director/Geriatrics, has long advocated that physicians discuss and appropriately document care goals and individual preferences with their patients who are seriously ill or frail.

“Patients nearing the end of their lives often worry about having their wishes honored regarding the level of medical care they do or don’t want,” she said.

“They fear that if they can’t speak for themselves, well-meaning family members or health care professionals may authorize extraordinary medical interventions that may slightly prolong life, but not its quality,” she continued.

Dr. Bomba, who served on the Institute of Medicine’s Committee on Transforming End-of-Life Care, recommends that all adults choose a person they trust to make medical decisions if they are unable to do so and complete a health care proxy. They also should discuss what makes life worth living and what matters most with their loved ones.

Before the CMS ruling took place, both Excellus BCBS and Univera Healthcare began reimbursing physicians for having end-of-life conversations with their members and completing appropriate documentation.

Dr. Bomba was instrumental in New York state adopting the Medical Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment protocol that allows seriously ill or frail patients to specify the level of health care they want and don’t want. The physician completes a paper MOLST form, a legal document that physically travels with the patient throughout all levels of care. Dr. Bomba recommends use of eMOLST, a Web-based application that allows clinicians to complete the MOLST process and New York State Department of Health MOLST form online. eMOLST also serves as New York’s MOLST Registry to ensure accessibility.

Information about the MOLST, health care proxies and end-of-life care is at CompassionAndSupport.org.

Information on eMOLST is at NYSeMOLSTregistry.com.

“Patients nearing the end of their lives often worry about having their wishes honored regarding the level of medical care they do or don’t want.”

Dr. Patricia Bomba, Vice President and Medical Director/Geriatrics
When Augustine (Augie) Tantalo collapsed getting up from the table on Dec. 6, 2014, neither he nor his wife, Elaine, knew how complex his medical situation would become. Unaware he had fallen and had had a brain bleed, along with other complications, Augie woke up to the bright lights of the hospital.

Initially released from the hospital to St. John’s Home for rehabilitation, Augie came home to become a Lifetime Care patient—again. A home care patient in 2013, Augie was happy to have the same nurse, Colleen Vaughn, caring for him a second time, as was Elaine. Colleen visits twice a week to track Augie’s overall health, check lab results and answer the couple’s questions. Home health aides provide personal care twice a week.

Augie, Elaine and their children are engaged in understanding his condition and care, but his many health issues require a multi-disciplinary medical team, including a primary care physician (PCP), cardiologist, gastroenterologist, nephrologist and hematologist.

His PCP referred him to Dr. Aaron Olden, Lifetime Care’s Palliative Care at Home Medical Director, to coordinate Augie’s care with his team of doctors.

Dr. Olden’s primary goal is to keep Augie’s many physicians focused on the big picture and communicate his care plan to the family.

‘Augie likes to be in the know about his condition, and I’ve helped him understand things,’ says Dr. Olden, adding that his patient and wife are very knowledgeable.

But, Dr. Olden’s contributions to Augie’s well-being are much more than that, according to Augie and Elaine. For example, Dr. Olden takes time, often 20 to 30 minutes, to speak with their daughter, Patricia, who lives in Tennessee, about her father’s condition.

“She’s not a 1,000 miles away,” said Augie, “she’s only as far as the doctor’s call.”

Augie stressed that Dr. Olden does not take the place of his other doctors.

“But, it’s nice to know we have him if we need other resources. As Augie needs more care, we know Dr. Olden can help us,” Elaine said. “Any questions we have, he follows up.”

The goal of the Palliative Care at Home program is to partner with the doctor’s team, coordinating care, managing serious illness symptoms, and improving quality of life. Because Dr. Olden visits patients in their homes, he can better customize the care to meet their and their family’s needs.

Augie and Elaine feel lucky to have the extra support.

“I need all of the medical guidance I can get!” said Augie.
“The funding from Excellus BlueCross BlueShield for the 12-Lead EKG Initiative will provide Northern New York EMS agencies with the necessary technology to transmit a 12-Lead EKG report to an emergency department physician. Using the report from the field, the physician can direct the rescue squad to the appropriate facility for the necessary care as quickly as possible. As we reduce delays in patient care, we will be able to save lives and provide a more rapid diagnosis. By November 2017, all advanced life support ambulance services in the tri-county region will be able to transmit a 12-Lead EKG report.”

Joe Goss, EMS Programs Manager, Fort Drum Regional Health Planning Organization

“The diagnosis of Alzheimer’s disease can be scary for both the patient and caregiver. We are glad to have a dedicated partner like Lifetime Benefit Solutions that has participated and sponsored the Walk to End Alzheimer’s® for several years now. Every year, their team helps to raise awareness and money to support Alzheimer’s care programs and research. Thank you!”

Catherine James, Chief Executive Officer, Alzheimer’s Association, Central New York Chapter

“There are many talented professionals working in the long-term care insurance industry, but we value our relationship with MedAmerica because of their company-wide culture of caring. The individuals you meet there are the real deal: kind and decent people who respect their policyholders. After all, it doesn’t matter if an insurance company has a pile of reserves reaching to the sky if it can’t answer one fundamental question, ‘Will they treat me fairly at claim time?’”

Stephen D. Forman, CLTC, Senior Vice President, Long Term Care Associates Inc.

“Nurse Practitioner Tom Fickett has been my mother’s, my own, and my husband’s provider for more than a decade. As a family, we have such gratitude to the receptionists, the ‘Kathys’ at the lab, the nurse practitioners and physician assistants who deal with us on a one-to-one basis—it’s like family.”

Alyceann Porter, Hamburg Health Center, Lifetime Health Medical Group
“I feel like I’m normal again!”
Campers who attend the American Diabetes Association’s Camp Aspire often say the experience is life-changing.

“I love the feeling of being at camp, being part of a community and feeling like I’m normal again,” said one recent attendee.

“I begged my daughter to give camp a try for two years, and she always said ‘no’. She finally went and it changed her life,” said the parent of another camper.

The American Diabetes Association’s largest youth program, Camp Aspire takes place at the Rotary Sunshine Campus in Rush, N.Y., on 156 acres of land in a rural setting. The goal of Camp Aspire is to allow campers to feel at ease and accepted in a community where having diabetes is the rule, not the exception. Under skilled medical supervision, campers combine outdoor fun with diabetes support and education.

“Partnering with the American Diabetes Association, Excellus BlueCross BlueShield generously provided $6,000 worth of financial aid that allowed 10 campers to attend camp who otherwise would not have been able to afford the experience,” said Ethel Duble, Associate Director of Corporate Development, American Diabetes Association.
“Providing our children with hands-on culinary education gives them the tools to control their own healthy journey. The Excellus BCBS Community Health Award will make it possible to bring Kids Get Cooking into two Otsego school districts, Morris and Milford, in the Bassett Healthcare Network. This program aims to expose young children to simple culinary techniques, common kitchen equipment, and basic ingredients, while also incorporating Common Core learning standards. Sustainability rests in the hands of the Food Directors who will be provided with the equipment to continue in-class cooking with students, K through sixth.”

Chris Burrington, 5-2-1-0 Project Coordinator, Bassett Healthcare Network, Research Institute
“The Excellus Community Health Award program provided a major benefit to the residents of the Masonic Care Community Health Pavilion. Thanks to the grant, we expanded our popular garden program that allows seniors of all abilities to experience the joy of growing, harvesting and consuming their own vegetables. These raised gardens were also utilized by our rehabilitation team as an additional tool to help the residents increase their cognitive abilities, fine motor skills and/or social interaction. The residents, their families and staff sincerely appreciate the focus Excellus BlueCross BlueShield has placed on creating healthy lifestyles for all.”

Victoria Cataldo, Director of Development, Masonic Care Community, Utica

“The grant from Excellus BlueCross BlueShield is helping Dryden Middle School kick start their Fuel Up to Play 60 program. The students are now on their way to healthier lifestyles by making the commitment to nutritious foods such as low fat and fat-free dairy, fruits, veggies and whole grains and 60 minutes of daily physical activity.”

Carol Beebe, Dairy Council Health Foundation Board Member, Central New York

“My experience with MedAmerica relates to the people who work there. I was always treated not as a customer, but as a person needing advice and help finding the right path. I never felt like the staff at MedAmerica were trying to sell me anything. They are there to help.”

Michael Francesco

“During Hospice Chautauqua County’s Death Over Dinner series, participants shared a meal with loved ones while having a facilitated conversation about documenting wishes for end-of-life care. “Univera Healthcare’s support allowed us to host six dinners, which created momentum for this important process.”

Thomas Putnam, HCC Medical Director
A good night’s sleep guaranteed

When City Mattress in Buffalo wanted to donate mattresses and bedding to local nonprofits, the company turned to its health insurer, Univera Healthcare, for ideas. Working with Univera’s Community Affairs Director Olivia Belter, City Mattress has donated nearly 100 mattresses and bedding sets to several organizations, including Gerard Place of Buffalo. Gerard Place provides transitional housing for women and children. City Mattress employee Dallas Smith loads a mattress destined for a local WNY charity.

“A grant from Univera Healthcare is helping us replace the wood chips with a new barrier-free rubber composite surface. The kids we serve who are dependent on wheelchairs, strollers, walkers, crutches and braces now can focus on playing and socializing with others. They’re having fun while benefitting from teamwork, independent play and developing their gross motor skills… all without feeling like they’re in therapy.”

Jeff Paterson, Niagara Cerebral Palsy Executive Director

“The $2,000 community health award from Excellus BlueCross BlueShield helped the Young & Gifted Global Ministries food pantry to purchase membership in the Foodlink food bank and a full size deep freezer that allows us to store more food and serve more people. The food pantry serves low income residents of the City of Rochester. The people we serve are suffering from all sorts of health issues so eating properly is very important for them.”

Pastor Sherita Traywick, Young & Gifted Mobile Food Pantry, Rochester
“He realized he wasn’t alone

When Richard “Dick” Kazeck joined Renew Health’s Chronic Disease Self-Management Program in the Southern Tier, he could barely walk to the end of his driveway. During class, he created a plan to ride his stationary bike five times a week for a total of 160 minutes. He’s upped his goal now to 200 minutes a week.

Hospitalized for chronic kidney disease shortly before he began the program, Dick has since stayed off dialysis, and his kidney function has improved.

Dick appreciates that the course allowed him to interact with people who have a variety of health issues, not just kidney disease.

“I realized that other people with different health concerns are in my similar situation. I wasn’t alone,” he said, adding, “I like proceeding at my own pace and choosing whether to participate or not in any given activity. Usually, I come around and want to join in.”

“Thanks to a grant from Univera Healthcare, the Lions Club Diabetes Center at Jones Memorial Hospital in Wellsville is now able to offer one of the most effective tools in the diabetes care kit: continuous glucose monitoring. While a traditional blood glucose meter provides just a snapshot in time of a person’s glucose level, continuous glucose monitoring measures levels in real-time, day and night, which helps providers design treatment programs based on a patient’s glycemic profile.”

Brenda Torrey, R.N., Diabetes Nurse Educator, Jones Memorial Hospital, Wellsville

“The girls enjoy this program because it gives them the opportunity to express themselves in a safe and friendly environment.”

Emma McCarthy, Smart Girls Program Coordinator and Lead Rec Counselor
Healthy Child Fitness Day at Buffalo’s Medaille College marked the end of a three-year program to bring physical activity and nutrition into the lives of Bethel Head Start children and their parents. Univera Healthcare funded the program, and college faculty wrote the curriculum for Bethel Head Start Program teachers. Univera Healthcare’s grant also facilitated the collection of data from mothers, fathers and teachers about students’ participation in the activities, as well as the parents’ challenges in providing healthy meals for their kids.

“Thanks to the underwriting support from Univera Healthcare, our teachers, children and parents are learning about the importance of healthy bodies and healthy minds, and can model those behaviors at home and at school,” said Bethel Head Start Health Manager Paul Lowman.

In a letter to Dr. Mark Cohen, left, internal medicine physician and pediatrician at Lifetime Health’s Perinton Health Center, patient Doug Lyttle expressed his “deep appreciation for the special time you so freely gave me that afternoon and evening as you addressed not just the one issue that my appointment called for but continued to help me with a multiplicity of medical problems. As people left the building and darkness fell, it was just you and me and a cleaning man. What you did for me that evening was helpful beyond my telling.”
“Lifetime Care provided in-home physical therapy following my knee replacement in 2012 and my hip replacement in 2014. Everyone at Lifetime Care was extremely professional, but I would most highly commend my physical therapist, Chuck (Charlebois, pictured above), for his knowledge, gentle persistence and empathy during both rehabilitations. My surgeon’s work was successful because of the care I received from Chuck and his colleagues at Lifetime Care, whom I recommend highly.”

David L. Murphy, Rochester

“While riding bicycles is a great way to stay healthy, it is critical that our communities ensure that it is safe for both children and adults to ride bikes. Excellus BlueCross BlueShield has been a generous partner for us in the effort to get bike helmets to kids who need them. Everyone appreciates knowing that our kids are learning to ride safely. Thanks Excellus BlueCross BlueShield!”

Victoria Armstrong, Coordinator, Creating Healthy Places Project, A Project of the Health Planning Council & the Human Services Coalition, Central New York
“The Steuben Rural Health Network is very fortunate and grateful to have received the Excellus BCBS 2015 Community Health Award. From young girls learning empowerment through physical activity to seniors becoming self-managers and advocates of their own health, your grant has been a tremendous contribution to our community-wide programs, truly impacting health and wellness in the Southern Tier.”

Olivia Dates, Director of Communications, Steuben Rural Health Network at the Institute for Human Services Inc.

“Planned Parenthood of the North Country New York created the ‘Be the man, Self-Exam’ campaign to share potential life-saving cancer information with men residing in our affiliate in Essex, Franklin and Clinton counties. Through the Excellus BlueCross BlueShield funding, this educational campaign provided men and their partners with information on how to perform a testicular self-exam, the risk factors and signs of testicular cancer and why regular self-exams are important. A ‘Lifetime of Care’ card with our health and education services, health center locations and phone numbers, along with a mini LED flashlight, were distributed to patients throughout our affiliates. Excellus BlueCross BlueShield’s support helps to protect and provide health care and education that empowers women, men and families—No Matter What. We are very grateful.”

Jane Spencer, Fund Development Officer, Planned Parenthood of the North Country New York Inc.

“The Excellus BCBS grant helped buy school kits that include a large fuel pump poster (official fuels of the human body), food cards, traffic signs, classroom healthy choices signs and nutrition signs. These signs are displayed around the school and act as reminders for students to make healthy choices. Each student also signs a ‘Healthy Highway Pledge’ to make at least one healthy choice a day.”

Dan Halpern, Director of Programs, Healthy Highway School of the Holy Childhood, Rochester
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