



Testimony of VNS Health

Joint Legislative Budget Hearings

Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Executive Budget Proposal Health and Human Services

February 12, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the impact of health and human service programs in New York State, particularly those that support older adults in their communities. The comments below will focus on the importance of protecting, preserving, and supporting Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) and Neighborhood NORCs.¹

For 130 years, VNS Health has helped people live, age, and heal where they feel most comfortable — in their homes and communities. As the largest nonprofit home and community-based healthcare provider in New York, VNS Health provides high-quality home and community-based care to more than 50,000 New York State residents each day through a wide range of services, including skilled home care, hospice, long-term care, and behavioral health care.

NORC Nursing Services Overview

N/NORCs were founded with the goal of transforming residential complexes and neighborhoods to meet the needs of older residents and enable them to remain living independently in their homes, thrive in their communities, and delay hospitalization or nursing home placement. N/NORC residents are often grappling with multiple chronic illnesses and require consistent access to health care and social services to avoid hospitalizations and poor health outcomes. VNS Health nurses at NORCs support a comprehensive range of services to support older adults successfully aging in place. This includes:

- **Clinical Assessments:** Provide health assessments (both in the client's home for homebound clients and in-office) to determine residents' current healthcare status.
- **Health Education:** Educate residents on disease prevention and chronic health conditions.
- **Health Care Advocacy:** Help residents understand how to successfully navigate the healthcare system and advocate for necessary services.
- **Preventative Care:** Provide blood pressure screenings, flu shots, balance screenings, and connect clients with doctors.
- **Recreational, Social, and Cultural Activities:** Address social isolation and mental health issues.
- **Community Connection:** Connect members to ancillary services that are tailored to specific communities.

VNS Health N/NORCs

The VNS Health N/NORC Nursing Initiative currently provides essential nursing services to 38 N/NORCs across the city, reaching approximately 20,000 residents. We aim to expand our services to provide these services at three additional N/NORCs, bringing the total to 41 sites. Our registered nurses serve as trusted partners, facilitating aging in place through health assessments, education, advocacy, and care connections.

¹ N/NORC indicates both NORC and Neighborhood NORC programs

VNS Health has a special presence in Lower Manhattan's Chinatown to help residents find local health and social programs. The Chinatown N/NORC, located in the VNS Community Center in Chinatown, helps people who are 60 years or older and live in a 24-block area of Chinatown. Currently, this program connects more than 600 Chinatown residents to culturally and linguistically competent services and collaborates with more than 40 other community organizations. Chinatown NNORC staff have worked quickly to disseminate information on Covid-19, RSV, and the flu, as well as provide supplies from the NYS Department of Health, NYS Office for the Aging, and NYC Aging. The Chinatown N/NORC team has touched the lives of more than 1,445 community members throughout their years of service.

Sustainability Challenges

The success of the N/NORC program is dependent on the funding and resources it receives. Since FY 2019-2020, the Legislature has provided additional funding to support nursing services in N/NORCs, most recently at \$1 million. Each N/NORC receives \$23,256 from this funding, and crucially, it is not subject to unit of service hour increases. Unfortunately, this nursing enhancement was not included in the Executive Budget once again. Budget cuts and changes in funding to N/NORC programs jeopardize the long-term sustainability of the program, which further impacts the continuum of home and community-based healthcare services for all senior residents, particularly as the State's population grows older. Without adequate funding of this initiative, VNS Health would not be able to provide nursing care to over 20,000 older adults.

I strongly urge the Legislature to allocate funding for N/NORC nursing this year. This will account for the reduction in pro-bono nursing hours, the recent increase in nursing rates (which have increased by 18% since the Legislature first began providing these funds), and the growing demand for health care services in N/NORCs. Furthermore, the Legislature must invest in the human services workforce with a 7.8% cost-of-living adjustment (COLA), and ensure ALL human services workers are included by passing S.1580/A.2590.

Conclusion

VNS Health's mission is to improve the health and well-being of people through high-quality, cost-effective health care in the home and community. Protecting, preserving, and supporting NORCs is critical to fulfilling this mission. We urge the State to continue and expand their important investment in the NORC program, which is essential to supporting and caring for the growing older adult population of New York. VNS Health looks forward to working with the State to ensure our older adults have the appropriate nursing services and access to the care they deserve. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this critical issue.

For further questions, please reach out to:

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