

BMA Allies on the Frontlines of COVID-19 Response

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As Better Medicare Alliance continues our work from home, and as we each take the precautions advised by public health officials to keep ourselves and others safe, we also have

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much of the BMA community – are at heightened risk for complications from coronavirus. While we at Better Medicare Alliance work to identify policy solutions to meet beneficiary needs, we have also heard stories from the frontlines in health care of how our Ally organizations are finding new ways to serve Medicare Advantage beneficiaries in this unprecedented time.

Health Care Providers

ChenMed is a BMA Ally that operates a network of 59 primary care centers for seniors on Medicare Advantage across the country. *Modern Healthcare* [reported](#) on how they are leveraging telehealth to treat up to 90 percent of patients during this outbreak. This keeps patients safely at home and limits their exposure to this virus. ChenMed staff are even dropping off iPads at the homes of patients who lack the technology to make their virtual appointments.

ChenMed CEO Chris Chen explained [in a recent interview](#) with the health care podcast “Tradeoffs” how his organization has nimbly adapted its model of care to adjust for coronavirus-related concerns and the isolation that some seniors may experience as a result.

“Our teams, they may need to do shopping for our patients in order to help them stay home. They may need to get on the phone just to have what we call ‘happiness calls,’” said Chen. *“Our patients, they are already very lonely and they used to use our centers as one of the best outlets to get over loneliness. They can play bingo, do tai chi, do salsa classes ... so we’re going to have to figure out how to do that virtually.”*

Likewise, **Oak Street Health**, another BMA Ally, dedicated to delivering high-quality primary care to seniors – particularly in medically underserved communities – is [using](#) telephone and video visits to meet patient needs during this pandemic, while offering [support and answers](#) to patients who may have questions or health concerns related to coronavirus.

Lauren Geschrey with Pathways to Living – a senior living community that partners with Oak Street Health – described the value of Oak Street’s services in this difficult season during [an interview](#) with *Senior Housing News*. Geschrey says her organization’s partnership with Oak Street Health “absolutely” gives her confidence in the face of the coronavirus pandemic.

Similarly, **Iora Health** CEO Rushika Fernandopulle shared with me how Iora is reaching out to every one of its patients, starting with those who are most chronically ill, to ensure they are cared for, know how to communicate with their doctors, and have their immediate needs

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groceries and ensure patients have access to the necessary resources to stay well.

Landmark Health also reached out to BMA to share how they are continuing to serve patients in this time. Landmark is in a unique position amid this pandemic: they specialize in at-home physician visits for Medicare Advantage patients with multiple chronic conditions. They know that in-home visits carry risks for their providers, so all patients are asked coronavirus screening questions prior to the house call to determine whether a visit can proceed as normal, or if their doctors should arrive with protective equipment. In either scenario, they ensure patients will continue to receive the care they need.

Community Organizations

With Medicare Advantage beneficiaries across the country staying in their homes as much as possible to prevent exposure to coronavirus, food insecurity can become a greater concern. Thankfully, BMA Allies like **Meals on Wheels America** and **MANNA** are working diligently to supply nutritional home-based meals.

These organizations face special challenges today. Demand for their services has increased during the coronavirus outbreak, while some volunteers are also self-quarantining and [unable to help](#). Still, they are [keeping their doors open](#) and their delivery trucks running. In some cases, senior leaders of the organizations are making deliveries in lieu of volunteers to ensure that meals can arrive to their destination on time.

Meals on Wheels has established a [COVID-19 response fund](#) to help meet the increased demand for nutritious meals that keep seniors safe at home. Similarly, MANNA is [actively seeking volunteers](#) in Greater Philadelphia area, southern New Jersey and beyond. Donations are also helpful during this time.

While these organizations meet seniors' nutritional needs, our Ally **Tivity Health** is stepping up – literally – to meet seniors' fitness needs by offering its SilverSneakers exercise classes [via Facebook Live](#). SilverSneakers, which is offered free of charge to many Medicare Advantage beneficiaries, is also providing OnDemand video content so that seniors can choose from a variety of workout formats for their own at-home fitness regimen.

Health Insurers

Health insurers are rising to the challenge in the face of this outbreak, too. While recently enacted legislation has made coronavirus testing [free](#) to anyone deemed medically in need – including Medicare Advantage beneficiaries – health plans didn't wait for Congressional

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of waiving consumer cost-sharing for medical treatment related to COVID-19, including for Medicare Advantage beneficiaries. CVS Health, in coordination with state and federal officials, has opened up its own COVID-19 [testing site](#) and is offering [zero co-pay](#) telemedicine visits to Medicare Advantage beneficiaries.

Meanwhile, SCAN Health Plan is making it easier for beneficiaries to seek care [outside of their network](#) if necessary during this national emergency. While a Better Medicare Alliance-commissioned survey found that [94 percent](#) of beneficiaries are satisfied with their selection of in-network providers, SCAN knows that flexibility for patients is critical at this time.

In This Together

While the coronavirus pandemic can lend itself to feelings of isolation – especially for many seniors – the Better Medicare Alliance community knows that *we are in this together*. The coronavirus pandemic demands that all of us find new ways to care for our neighbors and foster community even as we are physically apart. We are proud of our Ally organizations who model this compassionate care in these uneasy times.

We know there are many other stories to tell and want to hear how you are adapting your outreach and innovating to care for seniors in this national health care emergency. Get in touch with us and share your story [HERE](#). We will continue to highlight these stories as a reminder that, even in this difficult moment, there is good news to be found.

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