

Bronx nonprofit gets \$2M loan to expand its services for national behavioral-health pilot

If a patient experiencing a mental health crisis calls Bronx-based VIP Community Services' help line at 2 a.m., a staffer will take the call and, if necessary, jump into an Uber to intervene in person.

That's just one of several services the community health center is offering as it participates in a national demonstration program for a new model known as the Certified Community Behavioral Health Center, or CCBHC. Providers with the new designation can earn higher Medicaid payments for offering a core set of services, including crisis management.

VIP will announce today that it has taken out a \$2 million loan from Vital Healthcare Capital, a community development financial institution, and the Nonprofit Finance Fund, a social lender, in order to take on its new role. But the goal is for the model to pay for itself, said Debbie Pantin, chief executive of VIP Community Services.

"This model will give us the ability to provide things like peer support in structured way," said Pantin. "Before we had grants that started and stopped and didn't provide continuity."

During the two-year pilot, which began in July, VIP will receive an enhanced Medicaid rate for any patient visit that includes one of nine core services. The rate is specific to each CCBHC but averages about \$250, according to the state Office of Mental Health.

The model is similar to the Patient Centered Medical Home, which uses enhanced reimbursement rates to incentivize primary care providers to turn their practices into hubs of care coordination and population health management.

VIP already offers some of the nine core CCBHC services, but the \$2 million loan will help the center hire 15 to 20 staff members, some of whom will focus on case management for patients with substance-use disorder, Pantin said.

Over the past two years, VIP's opioid treatment program has grown to serve some 1,500 patients.

"It's one of the reasons we have worked with the state to expand services and access to care," Pantin said.

New York is among 24 states that received a planning grant for the CCBHC demonstration program and one of eight the federal government eventually chose to participate. Following an application process, the state selected 13 demonstration sites for the program in January of this year, including five in New York City. —C.L.