Amida Care Offers Free and Low-Cost Services for Clients in Need

New York City–based Amida Care helps clients get the health care they need—for a price they can afford.

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When it comes to assisting the HIV community, Amida Care provides more than just key services to its clients—the nonprofit community health plan also offers a lifelong allyship.

Formerly known as Vida Care, Amida Care launched in 2003 as a health plan for people in New York City living with HIV thanks to a grant from the New York State Department of Health and the AIDS Institute.

Today, Amida Care helps its clients meet various health care needs on a no- or low-cost basis. To qualify, individuals must qualify for Medicaid Managed Care and be either homeless, transgender, living with HIV or AIDS or be the child of someone living with HIV or AIDS.

Amida provides hormone therapy, maternity care, dental care, hepatitis C treatment, HIV prevention (including PrEP), gender-affirming care, in-home visits and more. The nonprofit also provides in-home visits, an integrated care team for each client.

“We’re this hybrid between a community-based organization that is really providing high-touch member-centric care to our members, combined with the insurance company that meets their medical care and dental care needs and whatever other services they may be looking for,” says Kevin Steffens, vice president of clinical services and programs at Amida Care.

“We have approximately 2,500 members that are transgender or TGNB [transgender nonbinary] out of our 8,500 members,” Steffens said. “That’s 25% of our membership. When gender-affirming surgery became a covered benefit, we jumped right in and said this was going to be a program that we were going to go over and above for and really make sure that we’re providing the services that these members need.”



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Amida Care's approach to health is holistic. For example, clients are also encouraged to advance their overall well-being via participation in classes and events, such as yoga, cooking and informational sessions on various topics.

Sandrine Blake, assistant director of member events, manages the organization's special events. She considers these events particularly helpful. "It's very meaningful to be a service for the community," says Blake. "I think it's just super important for us to not only be a health plan that's focused on medications and going to doctor's appointments.... Health care can be complicated when it comes to navigation. It's really important for us to really not just hand hold but to walk people and educate them through these steps."

To Amida Care, health care is not just about doctor's appointments and insurance—it's also about offering clients a diet customized by its own dietitians to meet their particular needs. In 2020, Amida Care partnered with God's Love We Deliver to deliver free meals to clients' homes, keeping them out of the grocery stores during the pandemic, as POZ reported.

Amida Care also works closely with the many community-based organizations that provide direct services to its clients on a daily basis. These include Acacia Network, Community Healthcare Network, HarlemUnited, Housing Works, St. Mary's Center, Sun River Health and Village Care.

"We want to work closely with the community-based organizations, making sure that the members get the services they need," Steffens said. "We work very closely with all of our providers. [They] are part of the discussions that we have. It's vital that we work with the community-based organizations. We can't do it all."

Blake does not consider Amida Care's work to be restricted to its office in midtown Manhattan. She and Steffens have both participated in rallies related to Amida Care's work because of how strongly they feel about the organization's mission.

"The challenges are there, just like any other health plan would face," says Blake. "We are up to the task—to have boots on the ground, boots in the Senate, boots at the Capitol—wherever we need to be. It's just what we do as an organization. I don't think there is a challenge that's too big [or] that we can't take on."

"Seeing the difference in people's lives day to day when you help them with something, when you give them education, when they come back to you at another event and let you know how you've helped them and how that help has now helped someone else— it's what we do, and it's the meaning of community, and it's really our true passion as a health plan," says Blake.

For a free session with Amida Care call 800-556-0689 (TTY 711). Not sure you could benefit from Amida's services? Check out their member handbook.

Don't need services, but want to help? Amida Care accepts donations.

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