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HCA, Selfhelp Community Services to Expand Pioneering 'Virtual Senior Center' for All NY Home Care Patients Amid COVID-19 Social Isolation

Grant from Mother Cabrini Health Foundation to fund statewide technical expansion of Selfhelp's online VSC platform so home care providers statewide can offer service, connect patients

The distress of social isolation and technology's power to help overcome this divide are well understood by all New Yorkers amid the COVID-19 health emergency. Older adults, especially those who are homebound, are uniquely susceptible to these perils – now more so than ever.

To help, the Home Care Association of New York State (HCA) was awarded a grant from the Mother Cabrini Health Foundation to leverage Selfhelp Community Services' Virtual Senior Center (VSC) web-based platform so that all home care providers in New York State can offer the VSC to their patients.

“The Governor is calling for New York to ‘reimagine’ critical services with a focus on connective technologies that help solve needs fundamentally exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis,” said HCA President and CEO Al Cardillo. “Selfhelp’s Virtual Senior Center has already ‘reimagined’ social services, using powerful technology to connect medically vulnerable older adults and individuals who are homebound or isolated.”

“We are proud to work with Selfhelp under the Mother Cabrini Health Foundation project to make this robust platform available to all home care agencies and patients across New York State during the present crisis and as a lasting solution for social isolation concerns among older adults,” Cardillo added. “We thank the Mother Cabrini Health Foundation for making this possible.”

Research shows that isolation in older adults and persons with disabilities or chronic conditions is linked to higher risks or exacerbations of many physical and mental health conditions.

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COVID-19 and social distancing requirements have made this kind of isolation a fixture of everyday life for New Yorkers in far greater and more extensive ways, especially for the 4.3 million New Yorkers age 60 and older – a population that is projected to reach 5.3 million by 2030.

Home care providers deliver health, assistive, nutritional, and social supports to older adults and others at home. Selfhelp Community Services provides home care, affordable housing, and social services to 20,000 older and vulnerable adults in New York City and Long Island. Their Virtual Senior Center enables homebound older adults to participate virtually in live classes, tour world-famous museums, interact with peers, engage in wellness activities, and, most importantly, expand their social network. Participants can log into the VSC whenever they choose, review the weekly calendar, and join classes that interest them. Independent evaluation has found that joining the VSC has multiple emotional and physical health benefits: it reduces isolation and loneliness and increases connectedness and self-reported health status.

“We are pleased to be bringing the Virtual Senior Center (VSC) to seniors throughout New York State,” said Stuart C. Kaplan, Selfhelp CEO. “Our VSC is a lifeline for homebound older adults who participate in our live virtual classes every week. We know that joining the VSC has emotional and physical health benefits: it reduces social isolation and loneliness and promotes social inclusion. We hear from our clients like Rose who shared: ‘You learn stuff. It makes you happy. I don’t know what we’d do without it.’ Or Yetta who said: ‘As a retired teacher, I love being able to continue learning. I couldn’t learn from other people without the VSC because I’m homebound.’”

He added: “We are enormously grateful to the Mother Cabrini Health Foundation for this grant that will enable the collaboration between Selfhelp and the Home Care Association of New York State to expand the VSC, providing thousands of older adults receiving home care with engaging interactive classes, including a substantial health curriculum that will promote physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing.”

On this initiative, HCA, Selfhelp and home care organizations statewide look forward to further partnering with government agencies, including the state’s Department of Health (DOH) and Office for the Aging (NYSOFA), as well as Managed Long Term Care plans that provide care management and authorizations for a wide array of long term care and community-based services under New York’s Medicaid program.

New York State Office for the Aging (NYSOFA) Acting Director Greg Olsen said: “Social isolation was already a serious public health problem for older individuals who have limited social connections, and the COVID-19 virus has made this problem exponentially worse. HCA’s grant from the Mother Cabrini Health Foundation to expand Selfhelp’s Virtual Senior Center to all home care providers and their clients statewide will help thousands of older New Yorkers engage in health and wellness opportunities, participate in cultural activities, and stay socially connected. This innovative technological partnership is another example of how organizations across New York State are working together to provide critical services that improve the lives of older adults and their families.”

More information about Selfhelp’s Virtual Senior Center is here: <http://vscm.selfhelp.net/service>.

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HCA and Selfhelp will soon be announcing a webinar introducing the platform to home care agencies.

About HCA

HCA is a statewide health organization comprised of nearly 400 member providers and organizations delivering home and community-based care to several hundred thousand New Yorkers annually. HCA works to support providers in the delivery of high quality, cost-effective home and community-based care for the state's citizens. HCA providers include hospitals, nursing homes, free-standing agencies and health systems which operate Certified Home Health Agencies, Licensed Home Care Services Agencies, Managed Long Term Care Plans, Hospices, Long Term Home Health Care Programs, waiver programs, and an array of allied, supportive services entities.

About Selfhelp Community Services

Selfhelp Community Services was founded in 1936 and today Selfhelp is one of the largest and most respected not-for-profit human service agencies in the New York metropolitan area providing a broad set of services to more than 20,000 elderly, frail, and vulnerable New Yorkers each year, while remaining the largest provider of comprehensive services to Holocaust survivors in North America. Selfhelp offers a network of services including home care, social services, and affordable housing with the overarching goal of helping New Yorkers to live with dignity and independence.