

## **Support Program Now Available for Medicare Advantage Members with Advanced Illnesses**

Your Florida Blue Medicare Advantage patients now have a program to help them think through and discuss topics of advanced care and life planning.

Offered by Vital Decisions, Living Well is a voluntary, patient-centered service designed to:

- Help individuals identify their quality-of-life preferences and values.
- Assist them in actively and effectively communicating their priorities to family and physicians.
- Ensure a more effective shared decision-making process occurs during this difficult time.

### **Here Is What You Need to Know**

Vital Decisions specialists will not, at any time, interfere with the physician-patient relationship, provide medical advice or provide an opinion regarding the care plan or team in place.

The Living Well program is conducted through a series of telephone or video sessions over the course of the patient's illness. This is done by master's-level clinicians using unbiased methodology rooted in the fields of counseling and behavior modification. The specialists work with the patient and if appropriate, the family, in processing and applying the information shared by the providers. This helps ensure everyone is on the same page throughout the patient's care journey.

Through motivational interviewing techniques, Vital Decisions specialists focus on:

1. Eliciting the often-unexpressed priorities and preferences of each patient.
2. Assisting the individual to develop the right skills and confidence needed to clearly express their desires, goals and wishes.
3. Improving the readiness of patients to engage in discussions with their families and doctors.

We have included answers to frequently asked questions below. If you have additional questions about the program, please call Vital Decisions at 800-301-3984.

## Questions and Answers

### Vital Decisions Living Well Program

#### What is the Vital Decisions Living Well Program?

The Living Well program offered by Vital Decisions is a voluntary, patient-centered service designed to:

- Help individuals identify their personal values and quality-of-life preferences.
- Assist patients in actively and effectively communicating their priorities to families and providers.
- Ensure a more effective shared decision-making process occurs between patients, their families and their providers.

#### Do Vital Decisions specialists provide advice on medical situations or care plans?

No, Vital Decisions specialists do not provide medical advice or provide an opinion regarding the care plan or team in place. The interaction is focused on enabling the patient to participate in the process based on his/her intrinsic preferences.

#### Does the Vital Decisions program interfere with the patient-physician relationship?

No, Vital Decisions specialists will not interfere with the physician-patient relationship at any time. On the contrary, the program tends to enhance patient satisfaction and the overall patient-physician relationship.

#### How will this program impact my relationship with my patient?

Participation with Vital Decisions enables your patient to hear and act upon the medical options and care you are offering. This may enhance the communication you have with the patient. It also helps align the family with the patient's preferences.

#### What Florida Blue patients are eligible for this program?

While this program has been available since April for our commercial members, we are now expanding the program to our Medicare Advantage members.

#### When does the program begin for Medicare Advantage members?

Vital Decisions specialists will begin outreach to Medicare Advantage members on Dec. 1, 2020.

#### How are patients referred to Vital Decisions?

Eligible members are identified in three ways:

1. Physician referrals
  - To refer a patient, access your Florida Blue Medicare Provider Link, choose the *Forms* link and then select the first form, *Medicare Clinical Programs Referral Form*. Instructions are included on where to send the completed form.
2. Florida Blue case manager referrals
3. Members identified as eligible by Florida Blue's analytics program

#### How does the patient participate in the program?

This is a voluntary program available at no out-of-pocket cost to your eligible Florida Blue Medicare Advantage patients. Once a member is identified, Vital Decisions specialists will reach out to the member to explain the program and obtain his/her consent to participate. The program is

conducted with members (and, if appropriate, family members) through a series of telephone or video sessions over the course of their illness.

### **Will I receive information of my patient's participation in this program?**

When your patient engages in the Living Well Program, you will be notified and will receive information on how to access a secure portal to review documentation for the engaged member.

### **Does this program add to a physician's workload?**

Nothing will be required by the physician if one of their patients is enrolled in the Vital Decisions program. The provider can access the secure portal to review documentation for their patient engaged in the program.

### **Does the Vital Decisions program overlap with other supportive advanced illness counseling programs?**

The Vital Decisions program complements other programs your patient may be involved in, including mental health counseling and programs available to cancer patients and those with other advanced illnesses.

### **Why is Florida Blue offering this program?**

We are offering this program at no cost to your eligible patients to help improve their end-of-life experience.

Studies suggest physicians and patients are ambivalent about engaging in conversations regarding the patient's life priorities and health care preferences during the end phase of the illness. Research also shows end-of-life discussions may have cascading benefits for patients and their caregivers.<sup>1</sup> Yet more than 60 percent of dying patients do not recall having end-of-life discussions with their physicians.<sup>2</sup>

### **Can you tell me more about Vital Decisions?**

Vital Decisions currently works with multiple national, regional and local health plans across the country and their program has been recognized as a Best Practice in Consumer Protection and Empowerment by **Utilization Review Accreditation Commission (URAC)**. You can find more information on Vital Decisions [here](#).

### **Sources:**

1. Wright, et. al. "Associations Between End-of-Life Discussions, Patient Mental Health, Medical Care Near Death, and Caregiver Bereavement Adjustment, JAMA, October 8, 2008, Vol 300, No. 14. pp. 1665-1673.
2. Larson, D., Tobin, D., "End-of-Life Conversations: Evolving Practice and Theory," JAMA, Sept. 27, 2000, Vol. 284, No. 12, pp. 1573-1578