

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion for Whole-Person Care

A Strategic Positioning Statement for Vital Decisions' Advance Care Planning Services



Vital Decisions' goal is to improve the healthcare experience for all people.

This drives us to continuously refine our services to reach and engage all populations – especially to serve individuals who may distrust the healthcare system, with limited access to services, or with systemic and structural barriers to health and wellness.

Diversity, equity and inclusion are core values running through all aspects of our services, culture, staffing and operations. These values are integral to the role we play: Supporting and empowering all individuals in their right to advocate for care that aligns with their values and preferences.

Our work covers all aspects of advance care planning in a way that is compassionate and empowering because we hire the best people who deploy the right interventions, for the right people, at the right time.

Our approach to diversity, equity and inclusion in advance care planning is defined by three goals:

- 1. Increasing availability and access to our services**
- 2. Increasing the likelihood of engagement in the process of advance care planning**
- 3. Increasing clinically successful outcomes – activated, empowered, informed patients**

We are a human centered organization that is enabled by technology to provide an invaluable, highly appreciated experience for members for a need that is largely under-addressed.

Let's look at how diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) shape our approach to whole-person care...

1 Meeting People Where They Are

Increasing Availability and Access to Service

Advance care planning rarely happens without some external spark, and even then, plenty of obstacles stand in the way – from emotional to cultural to comprehension barriers. Increasing availability and access to this important support service requires anticipating the range of reasons a person might be reluctant to engage, and then we simply meet every individual where they are.

Vital Decisions' telehealth outreach and digital tools provide a huge advantage for accessibility. In addition, we have built out our strategy, services and tools to increase access in the following ways:

Preferred Language

Providing care in a members' preferred language is often met with sincere appreciation. Our bilingual team of Specialists engage Spanish-speaking members with an immediate connection of shared language. All of our educational tools are offered in English and Spanish, and our translations go deep to address the nuances of meaning. In addition to this, our language line allows us to conduct advance care planning sessions via real-time translations in more than 41 languages, including Spanish, Haitian Creole, Chinese Mandarin, Cambodian, and Vietnamese which are the most frequently requested languages.

Cultural Representation

Members are likely to see people who look like them on our website and in all outreach materials. Our communications materials emphasize diversity in imagery including age, race and ethnicity, occupations and activities, geographic settings, singles and couples, and interracial and LGBTQ families.

Education Level

Complicated medical concepts are painstakingly distilled to be explained in clear ways. Our corporate standard is to write all member-facing materials for a 4th or 8th grade reading-level to address a spectrum of members' literacy and educational backgrounds, and sets a best-practice standard for being easy to comprehend.

Stage of Illness

Specialists are not provided an individual's health risk profile when they call, preventing any bias that may influence the member's preferences and goals of care. We view all interventions that activate a member to clarify and communicate their preferences for medical care to be clinically successful, regardless of whether one chooses aggressive care or comfort measures – the informed, active decision is what matters.

Zip Code

Understanding that an individual's zip code is one of the most influential determinants of health, we incorporate this data into our identification model. Also, this information allows Specialists to know when a member may have limited access to care, and to see what local services are available for referrals and coordination of care.

Regional Nuances

Our Specialists reach members in every region of the country, across all time zones, and beyond traditional office hours as necessary. They know nuances of advance care planning and palliative care options available in each state. They understand varied access to healthcare services by geographic region and by rural or urban settings. And as a highly virtual organization, Vital Decisions has employed Specialists in all regions across the country.



2 Engaging with Cultural Humility

Increasing Likelihood to Participate

When a member answers a call from our telehealth programs, our engagement rate is very high – consistently 70-90%. Our highly refined use of motivational interviewing plays a big role in this success, coupled with the sophistication of our highly trained and experienced Specialists.

Motivational Interviewing

Our engagement model starts by building trust with empathy, and helping members surface why advance care planning would be important to them – often eliciting strong opinions about the care experience they want or don't want, and alleviating the burden on others of having to make care decisions.

Our Master's-level clinicians employ motivational interviewing techniques that establish an egalitarian, supportive relationship as the basis for these conversations. Specialists conduct 4 months of training at the outset of their journey with Vital Decisions, and ongoing coaching throughout the year to deliver this sophisticated model with consistency, at scale.

Once a person is clear on their “why”, the barriers to doing the hard work of advance care planning start to dissolve, and often turn into motivations.

The Talent Factor

Vital Decisions Specialists come to this work with varied behavioral and social health experience, but they share a unique set of values and talents. Most importantly, they are comfortable having delicate conversations. Every Specialist has an uncommon capacity for empathy and curiosity for every member client. They bring skill in employing motivational interviewing techniques, and often have a personal conviction or connection to the work of advance care planning.

The talent of our clinical team never stops growing. Our quality team reviews a subset of each clinician's recorded sessions for continuous improvement, such as ways to explain concepts like palliative care. Clinicians can review and listen to their own work and 13% of sessions are audited by supervisors.

Diverse Hiring

Our employees are our best and most strategic asset. We put much thought and scrutiny into the process of finding the right people because it takes the right person to be fully present with our clients during some of the most difficult conversations we will have as humans.

Diversity, equity and inclusion is the core tenet of our recruitment. It shapes everything from the language of the job descriptions to our screening processes to eliminate bias. Diversity of thinking, diversity of experiences, and diversity of representation improve every aspect of our work. In 2021, more than 50% of our Specialists hired identified as Black, Indigenous, or a Person of Color (BIPOC) – and we are committed in 2022 and beyond to ensuring our Specialist team can meet the needs of those we serve. We recruit in areas where member concentration is highest.

Cultural Sensitivity

Cultural heritage and beliefs often play a central role in a member's decision-making process and approach to healthcare. Specialists conduct deep foundational cultural sensitivity training around the constructs of race, culture and faith. They are also attuned to the impact of poverty: limited minutes of a phone plan, limited internet access or resource availability, and most importantly, distrust of the healthcare system.

Our Specialists engage with cultural humility. This practice emphasizes awareness of our own cultural influences, sensitivity to the cultural identities and concerns of those we serve, recognition of the limits of our understanding, and commitment to ongoing learning, openness, self-reflection, and self-critique to provide respectful and effective care.

Vital Decisions Core DEI Capabilities

100+ highly skilled clinicians, diverse hiring

Proactive outreach by phone to individual, surrogate/caregiver

Geographic and regional attunement

- Rural and urban
- All 50 states

Culturally sensitive methodologies

- Motivational Interviewing – Inherently allows individuals to guide the conversation
- Language Matters – Sophisticated manner of asking questions rounds out the member profile without assumptions for family, mobility/independence, dependents, faith, beliefs
- Cultural Humility – Advanced training twice a year on use of language to open up dialogue

3 Surfacing Values, Preferences and Goals of Care

Increasing Clinically Successful Outcomes

The most important factor in advance care planning is taking the first step.

To this end, we engage the member in many elements of advance care planning – choosing and designating a proxy, exploring an individual’s values and process for making decisions, creating an advance directive for medical care, and understanding options for palliative care and hospice.

We also employ varied advance care planning methods – from a self-guided online experience, to a single call intervention, to a fully guided multi-session experience. These distinct modalities allow us to serve our health plan partners’ full population.

So what constitutes a clinically successful outcome?

Measuring Clinical Success

While we see the impact of our interventions in the choices that people make, such as choosing comfort care sooner and more often, we can track incremental success in many ways:

- Planting the seed – Our Specialists deliver value in the first 30 minutes of a call, with education about the importance of shift points in an individual's health journey
- Identifying shift points – Specialists work to ensure care is aligned with an individual’s preferences, now and at the moment when things change
- Choosing the right proxy – Specialists help individuals understand the role of a proxy and the qualities of a good healthcare proxy in alignment with cultural constructs
- Surfacing goals of care – Rooted in the individual’s “why”, Specialists lead a conversation to clarify the member’s deepest values, something that people don’t think about without prompting
- Clinical understanding – Specialists explain in layman’s terms what medical scenarios entail, what selective measures are available, and what it means to take advantage of comfort care

Members' Voices

The most powerful and sustainable tool in advance care planning is the voice of an activated, empowered, and informed patient. Our final deliverables, distilled from our interactions with the member, capture the individual voice – their words, their experience, and how their cultural constructs inform how they make decisions.

Active and Advocating

So many individuals assume their physician will bring up the discussion, when it's time to consider making hard decisions about life sustaining options. In everyday practice, physicians can be reluctant for fear of signaling a lack of hope – and often lack the time or training to guide these intensely emotional planning conversations.

With information about medical scenarios and clarity on what really matters in their lives, people find their voice. They advocate for what care they want or don't want, and play an active role in communicating the healthcare experience they want to their family and their physicians. We also provide tools so they can upload their advance care plan to national networks that can be accessed at the point of care.





Always More To Do

Member participation doesn't end with us

There is so much more we can do once clarity is achieved, and a trusting relationship is forged between a member and our Specialists. As an extension of the member's health plan, our Specialists will often mobilize other resources. They will:

- Engage people in their health journey who might have lost touch with providers
- Make referrals to other health benefits, noting details like when a member is homebound and needs a telehealth modality
- Complement case management team efforts
- Assess crisis situations and get referrals quickly to health plan care managers, appropriate providers, emergency medical care resources etc.

Successful advance care planning supports diversity, equity and inclusion in healthcare. DEI is a core element of whole-person care – especially when advance care planning is done in an inclusive way.

When people are informed and empowered and their uniqueness is recognized, they bring their whole self to medical decision-making with their providers and caregivers. They are more confident speaking up about their preferences, goals of care, and the care experience they want. With a strong voice, they are more likely to be seen and heard by the medical community.

We are simply a spark, a catalyst in honor of each individual voice, thousands of times over.

Vital Decisions is an affiliate of New Century Health.

About Vital Decisions

Enabled by behavioral science methodologies, proprietary analytics and clinical experts, Vital Decisions provides collaborative decision making and advance care planning support to ensure individuals' care is aligned with their wishes – now and in the future as their medical situation changes.

About New Century Health

The specialty care management company is on a mission to drive cost and quality improvements in oncology and cardiology from diagnosis through end-of-life. New Century Health manages more than 10M lives in 45 states with 25 leading payers and risk-bearing providers.

