Health Data
Management

SCAN Health Plan targets seniors' digital prowess, loneliness

By **Diana Manos**
Published **March 27 2019, 7:31am EDT**

When it comes to aging in place, loneliness and isolation are two of the biggest factors that can negatively affect seniors' health.

That's held true for years, say executives at Long Beach, Calif.-based SCAN Health Plan, which has spent the bulk of its more than 40-year history addressing social determinants of health, before SDOH was a popular term.

According to Adrienne Morrell, SCAN's senior vice president of government affairs, SCAN was launched in 1977 by "12 angry seniors," who wanted to provide older adults with the social services they needed. Now, it is one of the nation's largest not-for-profit Medicare Advantage plans, and this January, the company announced it had grown to more than 200,000 members in California— a near 20 percent increase over the past five years. The company also boasts a 4.5-star CMS rating.

One of the keys to SCAN's success is how the company targets the frail elderly for special attention, especially those with multiple chronic conditions and who also suffer from loneliness, says Eve Gelb, senior vice president of healthcare services at SCAN.

Older seniors want to age in their homes, and SCAN knows it is ultimately less expensive to help them do that, by providing the services that they need to remain independent, Gelb says. One way to keep seniors from being isolated is through the use of technology, but some barriers need to be removed for that to happen. One of the services SCAN provides is a "geek squad" for seniors, to help familiarize them with technology, and to help them avoid being victims of online scams.

Most of the people 70 years or younger were in the workforce during the digital revolution, but those older than 70 were not exposed to the rapidly transforming world of technology, according to Gelb. These vulnerable older adults need help using technology, and it cannot be assumed that they are comfortable using telehealth platforms and apps for managing their chronic conditions. That's why it's worth taking the time to get them "where they need to be," Gelb says. She also points out that SCAN is also targeting senior members 70 and younger to make sure they are confident digital users before they age and develop chronic conditions.

Members of Medicare Advantage plans are typically in the upper echelon of age—the most frail, with the most chronic conditions and costing the government the most money, Gelb says. Even those in this group who are the most comfortable with certain levels of digital engagement often don't use it with healthcare, she says. "They might take photos of their grandchildren and send them digitally, but they won't take a photo of a wound and send it to their doctor," she says. "They don't feel comfortable getting an email from their doctor or with going on the portal to see a test result."

SCAN uses data to find who among this senior population needs face-to-face intervention. Members with multiple chronic conditions who live alone and with deficits in daily functions, combined with living in certain ZIP Codes that indicate they may struggle financially—these are the members SCAN seeks out to give more personal attention, Gelb says. SCAN uses clinical coaches or other seniors to work with these members. Sometimes an older adult will only feel comfortable talking to a peer about certain issues, she adds.