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## New Support Program Available for Commercial Members with Advanced Illnesses

Your Florida Blue patients now have a new service called Living Well, a program designed to help our members think through and discuss topics of advanced care and life planning.

In response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), we support the work of our providers and understand your patients are always your priority. Living Well helps members with an advanced illness to identify and communicate their life preferences, while supporting providers with patients needing to define these next steps in care. We recognize this is crucial to our members and to you, perhaps now more than ever.

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 patients 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's What You Need to Know

Vital Decisions specialists will at no 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 illness experience.

Through motivational interviewing techniques, Vital Decisions specialists focus on:

1. Eliciting the often-unexpressed priorities and preferences of each patient.
2. Assisting the individual 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've included answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs) below. If you have additional questions, please call the Provider Contact Center at 800-727-2227.

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

#### Do Vital Decisions specialists provide advice on the medical situation or care plan?

No, Vital Decisions specialists don't provide medical advice or provide an opinion regarding the care plan or team in place. The intervention is focused on enabling the patient to participate in the process based on his/her intrinsic preferences. The goal of the program is process-based and independent of the specific decisions and priorities which result from the desired process.

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

No, Vital Decisions specialists will at no time interfere with the physician-patient relationship. Experience has demonstrated that the program enhances patient satisfaction and the overall patient-physician relationship.

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

This program is available to our fully insured members (both individual and group) who are experiencing an advanced illness. At this time, members enrolled in Medicare Advantage plans, the Federal Employee Program® and administrative service-only plans, including the State of Florida Employee Group, are not eligible. Blue Cross and Blue Shield members from plans other than Florida Blue are also not eligible.

#### When does the program begin?

Vital Decisions specialists will begin member outreach in April.

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

Eligible members are identified in three ways:

1. Florida Blue case manager referrals
2. Members identified as eligible by Florida Blue's analytics program
3. Physician referrals

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

This is a voluntary program available at no cost to your eligible Florida Blue 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'll be notified and will receive information on how to access the CAREboard portal to review documentation for the engaged member.

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

Nothing will be required by the physician if one of their patients is enrolled in the Vital Decisions program.

### **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. Your communication with the patient will be more effective, and with family being more aligned to the patient's preferences, there will be less potential conflict throughout the illness experience.

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

No. Vital Decisions is complementary to mental health counseling and supports programs available to cancer patients and other advanced illness members.

### **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 that physicians and patients are ambivalent about engaging in conversations about 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> Even when conversations have been reported, patients need to go beyond comprehension to a greater depth of knowledge and the ability to apply information meaningfully to a particular situation.<sup>3</sup>

### **How can physicians learn more about this program?**

Providers can call Vital Decisions at 800-301-3984 to learn more about the Living Well program.

### **Where can I learn 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 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
3. Epstein, R., Peters, E., "Beyond Information: Exploring Patient's Preferences," JAMA, July 8, 2009, Vol. 302, No. 2. pp. 195-197.