



Health Plans Can Help Senior Members Manage Their Conditions From Home

5 Strategies for Empowering Seniors to Engage in Their Own Care

Many health plans' senior members are dealing with multiple chronic health conditions. Of older adults, 85% have at least [one chronic condition](#) and 60% have at least two. For members, managing these conditions from home by adhering to treatment plans, making the right lifestyle choices, and practicing healthy behaviors is crucial. But certain factors — such as a lack of knowledge about how to access resources and support, low health literacy, or having to manage multiple conditions at once — can make it more difficult for members to engage in at-home care.

For health plans and organizations, low condition self-management translates not only to poor clinical outcomes, but also higher costs. Chronic illness accounts for a [significant portion](#) of healthcare spending. Health plans have much to gain when it comes to maintaining population health and decreasing costs by better engaging members in at-home care and providing education about treatment plans. Older populations, in particular, could benefit immensely from the promotion of in-home condition management education. This population frequently experiences challenges ranging from transportation to medication adherence to difficulty with behavior change.

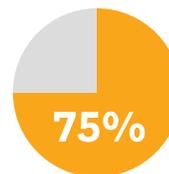
In this paper, we'll explore five ways health plans can empower senior members to take an active role in their care.



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Approximately **85%** of older adults have at least **one chronic health condition**, and **60%** have at least two chronic conditions, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



People with chronic conditions **account for more than 75%** of hospital days, office visits, home healthcare, and prescription drugs.



1. BE MINDFUL OF HEALTH LITERACY LIMITATIONS WHEN COMMUNICATING AND SHARING TREATMENT-RELATED INFORMATION.

Studies have shown [direct connections](#) between low health literacy and poorer health outcomes in older adults. For seniors to learn to manage their chronic conditions more successfully at home, health plans and clinicians must communicate information about health, chronic conditions, and treatment in a way members can understand.

In its [“National Action Plan to Improve Health Literacy,”](#) the Department of Health and Human Services outlines a few methodologies to accomplish this: Health plans can design communication products in ways that make them simpler for senior members and caregivers to digest. Large fonts are easier to read; simpler language is easier to understand; illustrated medication instructions are easier to follow. Simply providing information in ways that make it easy for seniors to digest and act upon can boost their health literacy and ability to manage their health conditions at home.



2. OFFER DIGITAL MONITORING SERVICES AS PART OF A VIRTUAL CARE STRATEGY.

Remote monitoring for senior members at home can be as simple as checking on them via text message or phone call. It can also be as comprehensive as analyzing precise, real-time biometric data, such as blood pressure and blood glucose levels that are measured by internet-connected wearable devices. The more avenues members have to connect and share information with their clinicians, the more effectively they can manage their health at home.

For example, if members experience a significant change in blood pressure or blood glucose levels, they can call or message their doctor to ask about the development. Alternatively, they can call a nurse advice line to determine whether the change warrants a visit to the emergency room or doctor’s office. With remote monitoring, clinicians can be instantly notified of developments even before the member reaches out.





This level of connectivity and engagement from the comfort of home can be a significant advantage to members dealing with chronic health concerns. Digital monitoring devices have already proven useful in helping members who are at high risk of cardiovascular disease. The [American Heart Association](#) (AHA) reports that remote monitoring is notably more effective than systematically scheduled care at helping adults reduce systolic and diastolic blood pressure.

The AHA also reports that the prevalence and cost projections of hypertension (a risk factor for cardiovascular disease) in U.S. adults are expected to soar in the coming years. However, remote patient monitoring is one opportunity to potentially stem the tide by helping members better self-manage their blood pressure at home.

3. INCLUDE TELEPHONIC TRIAGE THROUGH A NURSE ADVICE LINE IN YOUR VIRTUAL CARE STRATEGY.

Many of the most popular remote monitoring devices are internet-connected technologies that make connecting with healthcare providers easier. However, not all seniors have consistent access to an internet connection or are comfortable using remote monitoring devices in their daily lives. [Pew Research](#) shows half of seniors in the U.S. don't have an internet connection at home.

Having a simpler resource can be beneficial to many senior members. Nurse advice lines, for instance, allow members to connect with qualified healthcare professionals with a simple phone call. If members experience an episode or receive an abnormal reading while testing their blood pressure at home, they can call a clinician for advice on how to proceed.

The value of nurse advice lines to members who are managing chronic health conditions is significant. Members who have low health literacy also have trouble knowing when certain developments require a visit to their doctor and what conditions could be mitigated at home. By calling a qualified nurse who's informed about their health history, members can avoid unnecessary hospital visits while reducing their risks of adverse health outcomes.

In a study analyzing the [economic impact of nurse advice lines](#), researchers found they boost members' confidence in making the right decisions about their care, even if their health literacy is low. Telephone triage services are even more impactful when they offer multilingual services and translators and help members organize transportation to hospitals and health clinics, when necessary. All of this can be accomplished without members needing an internet connection.



Half of adults over 65 **don't** have internet access at home, and **one-third** have never used the internet.

4. OFFER VISION AND DENTAL BENEFITS.

Promoting health literacy helps members become more aware of the connections between chronic health conditions and other aspects of their wellness. This awareness makes them better prepared to manage their chronic health condition — or risk of developing one — by taking a broader approach to their health. When members are diligent about their vision and dental healthcare, they're more likely to detect and manage chronic health concerns earlier.

For example, members who have diabetes should attend regular visits to the optometrist as part of their disease management plan. Not only are these members more likely to develop glaucoma and cataracts, but they're also susceptible to diabetic retinopathy, a leading cause of adult blindness. Despite this, research shows [less than 50% of members](#) with diabetes attend regular vision appointments.

By being just as diligent with their dental healthcare, members can also maintain lower risks of developing chronic health concerns or address them as early as possible. The oral-systemic connection is a two-way street: In one way, chronic oral health concerns can influence risks of cardiovascular and other diseases. In the other direction, systemic conditions can manifest as symptoms in certain oral tissues and be detected early during oral health examinations.

Members need vision and dental health benefits if they're expected to stick to preventive healthcare routines. With proper coverage and understanding of their benefits, members are more likely to visit their healthcare providers regularly. This also gives clinicians a more detailed set of data to inform their treatment recommendations. Members are healthier and happier, clinicians are more successful, and health plans benefit from significantly lower overall costs of care.



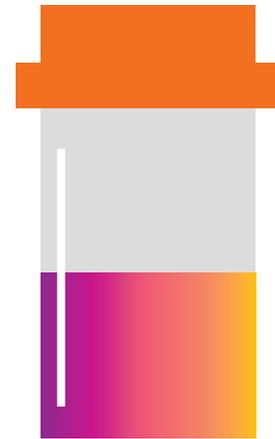
5. CREATE A CONVENIENT MEDICATION ADHERENCE PROGRAM.

Studies show that nearly 50% of people don't take their medications as prescribed. Nonadherence to medication is highly problematic for members with low health literacy or who have trouble refilling medications, whether due to cost or transportation issues. It's also wasteful, leads to poorer health outcomes for members, and is a large factor in exorbitant healthcare costs.

It can be difficult for individuals to alter their routines. This kind of change requires human connection, encouragement, and positive engagement with clinicians, nurses, health plans, and pharmacists. Techniques like cognitive behavioral therapy and motivational interviewing allow members to interact with compassionate professionals who know about their personal health concerns.

Dealing with a complex condition requires daily — sometimes intense — at-home health management strategies that can become overwhelming for members and their caregivers. Person-centered strategies help lighten the burden through pharmacist-led interventions, which occur over the phone and encourage members to own their health management. It starts with improving health literacy through genuine human connections and credible guidance.

Additionally, mail-order, 90-day supplies, pill packaging, and medication synchronization can all help promote medication adherence. Convenience and confidence in the care plan drive the best health outcomes for senior members.



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KEY INSIGHTS

Although it's a vital part of chronic care management, senior members often struggle to engage in their own care at home. Each of the strategies outlined above is an opportunity for health plans to take a role in helping senior members become more active participants in their own health — which can lead to better population health outcomes and lower overall costs of care. Here's what to keep in mind:



Healthcare communication and information should be designed with the reader in mind.



Remote patient monitoring can support the self-management of chronic conditions.



[Telephonic nurse triage services](#) can provide much-needed advice for at-home management of conditions.



Offering [vision](#) and [dental](#) benefits can encourage better at-home care by giving seniors the opportunity to have provider visits that can potentially uncover serious underlying conditions.



Having medication adherence programs in place that use person-to-person encouragement led by pharmacists can [increase adherence](#) and disease self-management.

Encouraging and empowering senior members to better self-manage their conditions can be much easier for health plans when they have the right partner. Envolve can help by providing nurse advice lines, supplemental health benefits, and solutions for medication adherence programs.

Ready to learn more? Partner with Envolve today!

SOURCES

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