

Amerigroup Community Care in New Mexico: Bringing Better Health Care to Those Who Need It Most



Amerigroup associates value the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of our members. That difference can best be witnessed in the Real Stories demonstrating achievements and progress for the many different individuals we serve.

At Amerigroup, we view these Real Stories as reflections of the care we provide every day on an individual, member-by-member basis. Sometimes, these stories show our commitment through sustained relationships and results, such as effectively delivering independent living options and empowering members to live a more fulfilling life. The unique scenarios captured through these Real Stories illustrate our hands-on approach to each member's situation.

The stories here feature four members – a 96-year-old woman who simply needs a helping hand in day-to-day activities and an aging couple hoping to live more comfortable lives outside of a nursing home.

We invite you to read further about just a few of our associates and the Amerigroup Real Stories that chronicle what we all achieve together on behalf of the approximately 2 million individuals we serve, one member at a time.



Promoting Independent Living

After spending a year in an Albuquerque, N.M., nursing home, Vera Gutierrez wanted to move back to her house and live on her own again. But, at age 96, Vera found that the road home was neither fast nor easy.

Vera was on her way to church in 2007 when she took a simple step and felt excruciating pain in her hip. The eventual result was months of physical therapy and rehabilitation. By late 2008, she was moving around comfortably with a walker and remained mentally “as sharp as a tack,” according to an acquaintance. However, even with the determined help of family members, Vera was unable to pull together the daily support and assistance she needed to live independently.

That’s when Vera and her family were introduced to New Mexico’s new Coordination of Long-Term Services (CoLTS) program and Amerigroup Community Care. With help from these two organizations and under the watchful eye of Amerigroup Care Coordinator Deborah Jaworsky, Vera was again able to live in the home she had known for 60 years.

“My aunt is pretty well off physically for someone her age,” said Gloria Perrine, Vera’s niece and legal guardian. “However, once she was able to leave the nursing home, we ran into a mish-mash of bureaucratic things that just didn’t work out.”

Like many people who are older than 65 with limited incomes, Vera gets her health care through the nation’s two largest publicly-funded health care programs, Medicaid and Medicare. All her medical needs, from hospital care and prescription drugs to home health services, are covered. But that still left Vera with a lot of work to do, and being responsible for her health care needs proved to be more than a full-time job.

“I had no idea what was involved,” Gloria recalled. “I found out it was up to me to find someone to take care of her at home, and I had no idea where to look. The paperwork was overwhelming. We just weren’t getting anywhere.”

Unfortunately, problems like this have been far too common among people who are served by Medicaid and Medicare or have disabilities. In 2008, the state of New Mexico launched an ambitious new program to do something about it.

CoLTS, open to 20,000 people, is a conglomeration of narrower, fragmented programs and authorizes the state of New Mexico and Amerigroup to provide all health care and administrative issues for CoLTS members. New Mexico is among the first states in the country to take this comprehensive approach.

By any measure, the CoLTS program is complex and far-reaching. The people targeted by CoLTS have a vast array of physical and psychological health needs. They speak English, Spanish and more than 10 Native



Vera Gutierrez, Amerigroup member, and Deborah Jaworsky, Amerigroup care coordinator

American languages and dialects. They live not only in the cities of Albuquerque and Santa Fe, but also in rural areas where medical resources are in short supply.

The objective of CoLTS is clarity and simplicity. Everyone who enrolls in CoLTS is paired with an individual care coordinator, who serves as the single point of contact for all questions about health care services. The care coordinator performs an individual health assessment to determine what people need when they enroll in CoLTS. This includes medical care, but for anyone who wants to live independently, it can also include household assistance and small home renovations, such as ramps or grab bars for those who have physical disabilities.

The care coordinator then matches those needs with experienced providers or caregivers who know how to address them. The care coordinator also oversees the often complex administrative task of reimbursing multiple providers.

This one-on-one relationship between a care coordinator and member requires a major investment of time and effort, but the state of New Mexico believes that CoLTS will provide more efficient, coordinated care that will cost no more than the traditional Medicaid and Medicare programs that CoLTS has replaced. When



**Vera Gutierrez,
Amerigroup member**

CoLTS care coordinators help people with chronic health problems better manage their conditions and stay healthier, they eliminate unnecessary trips to hospitals and emergency rooms. The state believes that by emphasizing relatively low-cost, preventive care, the CoLTS program can pay for itself while helping people address major health problems and live better lives.

In late 2008, when a frustrated Gloria reached out to Amerigroup in the early days of the CoLTS program, she found Care Coordinator Deborah Jaworsky. Gloria and Deborah teamed up and changed Vera's living situation in a matter of weeks.

Working together, Gloria and Deborah found a support services organization that could provide someone to spend part of every day with Vera, making sure she has help cleaning the house and getting proper nutrition. As another safety measure, Vera has a 24-hour-a-day emergency alert system that she can activate if something happens while she is alone. Gloria makes sure that her Aunt Vera makes regular trips to her doctor and gets the medicine she needs for her arthritis and high blood pressure.

"This has taken a huge burden off me," Gloria said. "And it's made a big difference to my aunt. She is getting what she needs.

"The nursing home she was in was very nice, but she wasn't happy there. Now, she's where she wants to be, doing what she wants to do. She goes to bingo on Sundays at the senior center. I take her to the beauty shop on Saturday. And the lady who stays with her is helping her clean out her closets. It's working out just great."

"This has taken a huge burden off me. And it's made a big difference to my aunt. She is getting what she needs."

Gloria Perrine
Amerigroup member's niece
and legal guardian



Overcoming Obstacles

For “Michael” and “Amy,” an elderly couple in New Mexico, their vision of living independently was fading. Then they discovered the Coordination of Long-Term Services (CoLTS) program and Amerigroup Community Care. Michael, 62, and Amy, 58, suffered from multiple health problems and had spent more than a year in a nursing home. They wanted to be on their own, but a host of barriers stood in the way.

Amy had limited physical mobility, primarily due to weight problems. She weighed more than 350 pounds. Michael suffered from serious lung and respiratory issues. The couple needed to find a place to live.

When Amy realized she could enroll in the CoLTS program, Deborah Jaworsky, a care coordinator at Amerigroup, helped the couple get their wish. Deborah had to first address a host of logistical and administrative problems.

“Every situation is unique, and you always have to find answers to new questions,” Deborah said. “In this case, a host of small things kept coming up to sabotage us. But we just kept going until it happened.”

Deborah helped Michael and Amy find an apartment that could accommodate their needs, and she equipped it with a lift and other gear necessary to help Amy get around. She helped them obtain daily household assistance and an emergency alert system that gets them help when they are alone. Deborah also arranged for the couple to see a family physician and to receive the medications their conditions require.

“People who want to live on their own should be able to do it.”

Deborah Jaworsky
Amerigroup care coordinator

“You don’t realize how overwhelming these things can be for people until you see how complex their lives are,” Deborah said. “But it’s incredibly rewarding when you’re able to help someone make a change. People who want to live on their own should be able to do it.”



**Deborah Jaworsky with Justin Goad,
Amerigroup care coordinators**