

County, VA team up for \$3 million pilot program for veteran care

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UTICA, Dec. 7, 2010 -- As many of the veterans that sought independence as their military calling age, a new pilot program is seeking to give them independence of their own during their twilight years.

"It allows veterans willing to take charge of their medical treatment the opportunity to do that," Ken Piazza of the Veterans Healthcare Administration in Syracuse.

The program is in partnership with the VHA and Oneida County and \$3 million is being provided through the VHA to run it on a trial basis. The idea is to coordinate medical and living services, primarily through the Oneida County Office for the Aging. It targets veterans that would otherwise have a high likelihood of going to nursing homes, and attempts to keep them in their homes. The pilot period is still undefined, but the program will be monitored for the results and outcomes it produces.

"Consumer-directed care is what we know is the direction now and in the future," said Michael Romano, Director of the Office for the Aging. "We're going to be looking at the outcomes and measuring the success and preparing our community to make that transition into the future."

The program is designed to provide services including but not limited to:

- Personal care
- Adult day care
- Case management
- Transportation
- Home delivered meals
- Housekeeping
- Assistive equipment

Piazza said the majority of the \$3 million will go toward staffing those services.

Oneida County Executive Anthony Picente said being that the county has an elderly population, and being that many in those generations are war veterans the

program fit the needs of the county. He said it was a 'no brainer' for him to go forward with the program despite the services and personnel it would require on behalf of the county.

"It's not about the cost," Picente said. "It's about compassion and caring for people and doing what's right by them."

Oneida County was the first county in the state to adopt the program, and Onondaga and Broome Counties followed. Currently, there are 12 veterans in Oneida County taking advantages of the services, but the plan is to expand. The reasons Oneida County was chosen first include that the Office for the Aging currently provides services conducive with homecare and there are central service coordination hubs throughout the area, officials said.