Vision
Harmonia Collaborative Care empowers individuals to be healthy and fulfilled.

Mission
Harmonia Collaborative Care delivers best-practice Health Home, behavioral health and senior services to foster individuals’ independence and improve their quality of life.

Core Values
We value integrity in the way we serve and empower individuals and are committed to:

Quality Care - We prioritize the quality of care we deliver, drawing from best practice standards, superior quality reviews, continuous improvement and personal commitment.

Compassion – We bring kindness, humanity, empathy and sensitivity to our work to ensure boundaries, maximizing client growth and allowing for provider self-care.

Collaboration – We are active and open to thoughtful collaborations supporting internal relationships, programs and community partners.

Culture of dedication, passion and joy – We outwardly express dedication, passion and joy about our work to our clients, team and community.

Behavioral Health:
Southern Erie, Northern Chautauqua and Cattaraugus Counties.

We can serve anyone in WNY. Our service area is expanding with new telehealth capabilities.

Health Home:
All of Erie, Southern Niagara, Northern Chautauqua and Cattaraugus counties

Senior Services:
Brant, Collins, Eden, Evans, Gowanda, Hamburg, North Collins and Springville.

CarePanion:
Southern Erie County

Expanding to meet the needs of Erie County and its surrounding areas.
The twists and turns we’ve all navigated have been substantial. At times they’ve been daunting... even defeating. We’ve all suffered losses, be they normal routines and minor inconveniences; more serious financial and wellness setbacks; or the deep, personal loss of loved ones. Yet through it all, we’ve survived, growing stronger and more resilient as a result.

Harmonia has experienced ups and downs too. From the initial uncertainty of how to care for our clients, to reinventing our service delivery and operational processes, to managing ever-changing government and CDC regulations, it’s been a bumpy journey that caused its share of bruises.

Yet, as we look ahead, we’re proud and excited to see the growth and depth of the team we’ve assembled during one of the most pivotal moments in the history of mental health and social services.

We’ve evolved. We’re stronger, nimbler and more innovative. We’re a complete provider, capable of serving a broad spectrum of client needs, and worthy of our community’s trust and support. So, as we emerge from our quarantine confines and return to a normal way of life, rest assured.

We’re **Ready. When You Are.**
Harmonia services are designed to improve and enhance mental health, personal growth and independence.

**Counseling Services** — Professionally trained and licensed clinicians provide treatment for mental health conditions. Our holistic, empathic approach enables clients to take advantage of quality therapeutic services which include:
- Individual therapy
- Marital/Couples therapy
- Family therapy
- Group therapy
- Crisis intervention
- Medication treatment
- Case management
- Links to vocational and social programs

**Health Home** — Our specialists help Medicaid recipients with mental health concerns and chronic conditions to stay healthy and out of the hospital/emergency room. Harmonia managers coordinate and provide access to care available in the community.

**Senior Services** — Harmonia’s specialists offer compassionate care to seniors facing the challenges of lifestyle change. Our Senior Service Managers provide a free assessment to link clients with:
- Health and pharmaceutical insurance
- Referrals to home care options
- Assistance with housing options
- Assistance with benefits and entitlements (HEAP, SNAP, Medicaid, etc.)
- Links to caregiver support groups
- Unbiased service provider information and referrals
- Unbiased nursing home information
- Transportation options

**CarePanion** — nonmedical in-home care providers who assist seniors and other house-bound clients with tasks such as housekeeping, errands, and safety reviews, while providing much-needed companionship to help them battle loneliness, remain independent and age in place with dignity.
We all strive to find harmony in our lives — the synchronicity between our family, passions, work and home. There are many challenges to a harmonious existence: sickness, addiction, the realities of aging and the burdens of life. Harmonia helps to harmonize our clients’ lives, so they can move to a melody that supports healthy balance. Harmonia is the Latin word for harmony. It can also mean melody, consonance and concordance. It speaks to disparate pieces working together to create something whole.

Harmonia Collaborative Care offers behavioral health and senior care services, along with Health Home case management from our two beautiful facilities in Derby and Hamburg, and via telehealth services to clients all across Western New York. Our counselors and staff pride themselves in providing empathic care to bring balance to the lives of those who entrust us with their care. We help people attain their highest level of well-being and maintain their independence through our integrated Mental Health, Senior and Health Home services, while reducing the cost of care for clients and funders.
I’m pleased to share this update, as we emerge from one of the most difficult and pivotal periods in the history of mental health and at-home care services. Despite many challenges, including program overhauls and organizational paradigm shifts, it’s clear we have emerged as a stronger, more flexible, more complete provider — and I’ve never been prouder of the wonderful people with whom I work.

For all of the pandemic’s negatives, one of its silver linings has been the much-needed spotlight it has shown on all of our service areas. There has actually been an increased rate of self-reported mental health symptoms, according to the National Institute of Mental Health, and overall awareness levels have increased (1). Fueled by social and mainstream media, businesses are now more comfortable discussing mental illness, and some associated stigmas are being diminished in attempts to improve workplace wellness. (2)

The pandemic also exacerbated the challenges facing seniors. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 95% of all COVID-19 deaths occurred in patients 50 and older. Nursing homes and assisted living facilities lost a great deal of public trust, as their vulnerabilities were exposed (3). Families were kept apart for months at a time, making many seniors even more adamant that aging in place was their preference.

The isolating impact of the pandemic was particularly hard for seniors and their caregivers — especially adult children who are part of the “sandwich generation.” These families long to regain access to many services they count on, be it out of necessity or convenience, to ensure their loved ones are cared for and safe as they age with dignity.

This added awareness bodes well for the care we provide and the clients we serve. The growth we’re experiencing underscores these changing paradigms and fresh perspectives.
2020’s Highlights

The pandemic caused us to re-imagine — and re-design — the ways in which we interacted with thousands of clients. From behavioral telehealth sessions, to check-in phone calls with at-home seniors, to the complete funding overhaul our Health Home team navigated, 2020 wasn’t short on riddles and ramifications. However, we not only traversed this evolutionary landscape, we actually thrived in several areas.

In Behavioral Health, we generated a 10.5% year-over-year increase in treatment sessions (15,501 vs. 14,027 from 2019). We achieved this as we helped clients realize that telehealth sessions were not only helpful — they were also convenient! Without the prep or travel time needed for traditional appointments, many saw the benefits of increased opportunities to speak with professional therapists, and begin or maintain care for psychiatric medication by our psychiatrist and psychiatric nurse practitioner as they managed the stresses they faced. In fact, it was so well received that we’ve implemented a new hybrid model, allowing some patients to continue the virtual format conveniences for some sessions, which has led to more frequent visits and consistent levels of care.

Our Health Home team also had to revamp many of its day-to-day processes. Client referrals from Erie County took a severe downturn as

Everyone that I have contact with is so helpful and caring. During the pandemic I have never felt so isolated. My case manager continued to reach out to me often to see if I needed anything. I live in a very isolating area but knowing you were just a phone call away helped me in so many ways.

—Jessie, Evans, N.Y.

Harmonia Client Engagement

The average number of treatment sessions per client was 11.0 in 2020 — a 28% increase since 2018, revealing a greater need for services during the pandemic and improved client engagement.
2020 Performance Highlights

We generated substantial year-over-year improvements, including:

Harmonia met the increased demand for mental health services:

- Our staff of clinicians increased by 41.7%.
- Treatment sessions rose 10.5% over 2019 – 15,501 total outpatient services delivered.
- Client engagement grew to an average of 11.0 sessions provided per client, up from 9.4 visits in 2019.

298 senior citizen clients were assisted to live independently in their homes – up 9.6% vs. the year prior – 25% of which were new intakes.

Our Health Home providers helped 112 clients with mental illness and chronic health conditions get much needed care and resources – a 5% increase over 2019.

Senior Services had additional challenges to overcome as state regulations and at-risk clients made in-person visits impossible. Tragically, some of our clients fell victim to the virus, while others were forced into caregiving facilities due to various circumstances. Our CarePanion services also experienced an unavoidable setback, as much of what they provide requires in-person interaction. However, both teams are now regaining momentum as vaccination rates climb and social-distancing guidelines soften. As the region “re-opens,” our providers are doing all they can to provide assistance, guidance or even simple encouragement via phone or virtual sessions to ease the stresses on this vulnerable population. We’ve even assisted several clients in receiving their COVID-19 vaccines at home!

And remarkably — despite these challenges — by the end of 2020, we generated a 10% year-over-year increase in our number of Senior Services cases managed,
including a 25% increase in new intakes.

Another exciting initiative for these teams has been the launch of the Healthy Ideas Program, in partnership with the Western New York Integrated Care Collaborative (WNYICC), designed to help seniors with depression management. We look forward to fostering this partnership and connecting our clients to these wonderful resources whenever possible.

We also had a number of successes in the grant-funding sector. In Mental Health, we received a $100,000-expansion grant through the Highmark Blue Fund, as well as a $28,000 grant from the WNY COVID-19 Community Response Fund. Both of these are designed to enhance our ability to provide rural and native persons with mental health services. Our CarePanion team also earned a $49,000 grant from the Garman Family Foundation to help expand its services.

This growth has led to more positives from a staffing perspective, including the promotion of Megan Brautlacht to Director of Mental Health Clinics. Megan now leads a team of 17 (as well as two doctoral students), which includes two new providers at each of our Derby and Hamburg offices. All together our team has added a new psychologist, a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW), a second full-time prescriber, a Medicare provider, and a rural/native mental health expansion coordinator. This compares to the 12 clinicians we had a year ago – and includes the departure of Rick Popson, LCSW-R, who began his well-earned retirement after 24 years with our team. We also added a new Health Home case manager, 1.5 Senior Service case managers, and a human resources and compliance specialist.

In the coming pages, you’ll read more about our service areas, including some initiatives and success stories within each. You’ll also see testimonials from people we’ve helped and the differences we made in their lives. All of this progress, flexibility and determination among our team has been especially invigorating to experience. I’m so proud that we were able to support so many of our neighbors during one of the most precarious eras of our nation’s history — and equally pleased that we’ve emerged well-positioned for continued growth. I hope we inspire you to reach out to us as well, be it for services, partnerships or financial support. No matter your motivation — I promise — we’ll do our best to make you proud to be associated with Harmonia.

Sincerely,

Valerie Nowak
LMHC, MPA
Chief Executive Officer

Our largest service area continues to gain strength and depth. We conducted over 15,500 treatment sessions last year – a 10.5% increase, which led to three new hires last year and three more which joined us over the past summer. We now offer 18 clinicians and prescribers in all – the most we’ve ever had – as well as three student clinicians.

This demand has been fueled in part by the pandemic, during which mental illness has been heavily discussed in mainstream and social media. In doing so, some of the stigmas previously attached to asking for help and receiving counseling have faded, as people grasped the importance of good mental health. Its social acceptance has steadily improved across all ages, genders and ethnicities.

“People are realizing the importance of mental wellness more than ever. You just have to want to talk to somebody,” explains Megan Brautlacht, LMHC, who was promoted to Director of our Mental Health Clinics this past year.

Telehealth became a silver lining of the pandemic, allowing clients to overcome transportation barriers, while reducing the time needed to complete a session. We’re also seeing enrolled clients more frequently. They have become more engaged in and committed to treatment (11-plus sessions), especially among younger demographics.

“Younger people actually like having a therapist,” Brautlacht adds. “It’s kind of cool to go to therapy now. The internet has helped them realize they aren’t alone, especially teens and young adults.”

In fact, we encourage our team to monitor social media, as they often shine a light on trending topics such as Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID), which has been “popping up” on TikTok and other platforms recently – fueling questions which clients then asked our counselors.

Another way we serve our region’s youth is via our partnership with Lake Shore High School. Our primary therapist at the school has now evolved into a full-time role. Our hope is that we can soon expand this successful program to other schools as well.

We’re also expanding our relationships throughout the community, educating more professionals and residents about our breadth of services and delivery options. We recently secured two valuable grants, including $100,000 from Highmark’s “Blue Fund” and $28,000 from the WNY COVID-19 Community Response Fund. They will allow us to provide even greater service to rural and native populations.

We’re also connecting with more primary doctors, especially in the Southern Tier. We’ve known for years that this area is greatly underserved, with fewer than 10 mental health facilities between Erie County’s southern border and the Pennsylvania state line.

Beyond the numbers, our colleagues continue to distinguish themselves with the array of certifications and services they offer. This includes...
Medicare providers, a hard-to-find resource in most insurance networks. We also offer a therapist trained in Reiki, a Japanese stress reduction and relaxation technique that also promotes healing. We have a clinician who specializes in geriatrics, and another who is a certified yoga instructor. Then, we added another full-time prescriber, giving us someone on-staff every day, Monday to Friday, at either our Derby or Hamburg locations.

We also leverage our organization’s strengths. Our Senior Services team, for instance, often works with our geriatric psychologist – who’s certified in psychopharmacology – so that a more complete understanding of a client is known. Dementia, for example, can falsely present and result from subtle/rare medication interactions or common ailments like urinary tract infections. This helps keep seniors out of hospitals and assisted living scenarios, which keeps their assets in place, as well as their dignity.

Substance abuse is another priority and strength. We collaborate with the Brooks-TLC Hospital System, a state-licensed Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services facility. We attend each other’s staff meetings regularly, removing silos which might otherwise exist. In addition, we’re combating the opioid epidemic, providing screenings and prescribing maintenance medicine (where appropriate), as we collaborate on state projects to battle this epidemic. Here we also offer an important point of differentiation, taking a proactive and pragmatic stance to help people overcome addictions. Many clinics require you to be discharged from substance counseling before you begin mental health services. That’s problematic in our opinion, because chemical dependency is often intertwined with mental health struggles; so, at Harmonia, you can enroll simultaneously – which usually results in a faster, more complete path to recovery.

Thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for being there when I thought I had nobody. You were there, the agency was there — we all were there to help. Thank you.

-Charles, Lake View, N.Y.
Many people experience substantial challenges resulting from unwise decisions or general misfortune. For them, our Health Home Team provides a lifeline that can get them back on their feet. Whether it’s recovering from substance abuse, overcoming homelessness, or transitioning back to society following an incarceration or hospitalization, our team helps these individuals turn their lives around and put the past behind them.

The pandemic created challenges for this area’s operations as well, including a 40% drop in in-person visits (565 in 2020 vs. 950 in 2019). However, we were able to pivot to a phone assistance model, logging 871 phone “visits,” compared to just 176 the year before – a nearly fivefold jump! In the end, we generated a 5% year-over-year increase in cases managed, and today we assist more than 150 clients. However, unlike Behavioral Health, where telehealth is therapeutic for a broad number of clients, Health Home clients often need a more intensive, direct-care approach. Despite our success in telephonic support, our services are best delivered in-person, and our team and their clients are pleased to have returned to face-to-face interactions.

We’re thrilled to see the success this group is having, with several growth initiatives underway. First, we have
expanded well into Niagara County, so much so that we’re hiring at least one new case manager to meet the demand. We’re also spending more time focusing on the Health Home Plus population – those with higher needs. These include people who have been incarcerated or under psychiatric care at the state level, as well as the chronically homeless, HIV clients, and those who over-utilize hospitals.

We’re also in the early stages of establishing a Children’s Health Home, for youth 18 and under. Our goal is to link them to services, providers and support options when their family system isn’t able. We want to help them at earlier ages to help keep them from becoming victims of their difficult circumstances and surroundings. So often with young people, a relatively innocent decision or occurrence can set them down a path that becomes much harder to return from as they age. In short, we want to increase these kids’ chances of having a healthy, fulfilling adult life.

We’re also thrilled to say that we “lost” 62 Health Home clients in 2020. Yes, as strange as it may sound, this team’s goal, ultimately, is to discharge its clients from care – because hopefully, it means they have become capable of managing their lives on their own, and most of those 62 individuals can be considered success stories. As we return to in-person interactions, we’re confident these numbers will continue to grow, which is good news for us all. Not only would it mean that fewer people are relying on taxpayer-funded programs – it means that fewer of our neighbors will be suffering.

I have been working with Health Homes for a while now. I started off working with Kristy [years ago] and followed her to her new job. She has helped me out a lot. She is always coming to my house; she visits or calls me when I am at the hospital. She not only helps me, but she helps my wife if she needs anything.

– Tom, Cheektowaga, N.Y.
Our Senior Services team was greatly impacted by the pandemic, as in-person visits were prohibited by the state until June of 2021. As a result, this team had to become especially resourceful, using Zoom, phones, email and text messaging to communicate with the hundreds of people they managed during the last fiscal year. Despite this, we generated a 10% annual increase in our case management numbers, including a 25% uptick in new intakes, driven largely by the increasing preference among seniors (and their families) to age at home instead of moving to assisted living facilities or nursing homes.

That’s where we do our best work. We’re the link to the services seniors need to stay in their homes as long as possible. We help them prevent falls, enroll in Meals on Wheels and Adult Day Care programs, connect with personal and environmental cleaning providers, and maintain their overall independence. We even direct clients to providers who can prescribe or administer key medications, including COVID-19 vaccines. We also assist and guide those who don’t qualify for full funding to sources or partial funding for select services.

Our resourcefulness this past year extended to our outreach tactics too. New clients were generated by having a presence at community events and word-of-mouth as opposed to traditional healthcare settings or county referrals. Tabling at senior centers, fitness facilities and farmers’ markets has helped us spread the word about our services and find new clients and families who want to work with us.

Funding is often a major issue for seniors in obtaining the services they need, and that too was negatively impacted at times during the pandemic. But now, COVID stimulus/rescue plans have become available, which is helping people to get approved for services more quickly. One popular need is a personal emergency response system (PERS) unit – the “I’ve-fallen-and-I-can’t-get-up” products we’ve all seen advertised. We’ve assisted many seniors in obtaining these life-saving devices by helping them navigate the county system and receive financial relief. Some people even qualify for a free unit.

We’re also taking a more visible role in the county’s senior care landscape. For example, we’re part of the Healthy Ideas Program, which helps seniors who are battling depression, in partnership with the Western New York Integrated Care Collaborative (WNYICC). Jennifer Gunia, our Senior Services program coordinator, has also joined the WNYICC Compliance Committee, which has allowed us to become more aware of the strengths and opportunities within other agencies and potential partners.

We’re also excited to partner with Erie County’s Department of Senior Services on its new “electronic pet” pilot program. Designed for clients for whom an actual pet may be too much of a burden, this gives them many of the joys of having a real-life companion. With both dogs and
cats available, these mechanical furry “friends” occupy our clients, giving them something to focus on while providing periods of much-needed relief to caregivers. The real-feel of these pets is surprising!

In terms of staffing, this team grew by two part-time managers during the year – and another performed so well that she was promoted elsewhere within Harmonia. This area will be pivotal in our continued growth because it often overlaps other service areas, providing synergies throughout our team. Plus, the trends we’re seeing suggest this demand won’t slow down anytime soon, as people continue to live longer. The pandemic made nursing homes less popular, as this population was especially vulnerable to outbreaks, and the resulting quarantine mandates forced families apart in unnatural and heartbreaking ways. We’re all excited to be able to focus on the future and return to providing in-person services to those who are comfortable welcoming us into their homes once again.

— Catherine, North Collins, N.Y.
Our CarePanion Program provides seniors and other homebound clients with housekeeping, errands, safety reviews and much-needed companionship. A perfect complement to our Senior Case Management and Behavioral Health services, our CarePanions are nonmedical homecare providers who help improve the chances that Harmonia’s clients can remain independent, at home, with a good quality of life.

Like our Senior Services clients, COVID-19 impacted the number of individuals we could serve and the way in which we serve them. Many of our clients – both private pay individuals and those serviced through Erie County Department of Senior Services – had reduced or discontinued services during the height of the pandemic. Additionally, targeting and recruitment efforts were limited for those clients for whom we receive support through the County. However, we have rebounded to 48 active clients as of July 2021, a 71% increase in people served compared to the year prior. We’re regaining much of the momentum we saw at the close of 2019, and are now back to 10 staff members and looking to grow.

We’re also thrilled to have received a $49,000 grant from the Garman Family Foundation to help expand our services to seniors in our region. We are trying to reach these people in need, as well as their current caregivers (often times, their adult children), through targeted marketing. This represents our first major grant in this area, but we’re confident it won’t be our last. We’re actively seeking further growth opportunities, discovering new client sources and new areas of need.

I was so stressed as a caregiver... Harmonia has helped me find the help I needed to keep dad safe in his home, while I continue to care for my own family.

– Mary, Angola, N.Y.
The potential of our CarePanion team remains high, as many more families are seeking to keep loved ones at home now, far more than they did before the pandemic struck. The stories people heard on mainstream and social media have made aging in place an even more popular choice, sparking a wide variety of emotional reactions. Sadly, some of our clients had to enter a nursing facility during the pandemic... and some were claimed by the virus once they got there. It’s made many families rethink their own planning.

As we return to a more regular basis of operations, it’s been wonderful to see how especially grateful our clients have been. Others had no idea our services existed before the pandemic, but they now feel like they could have many more “good” years ahead.

Without your help, I would not be able to live independently in my home. Your help is priceless.

—John, Hamburg, N.Y.
Salute to Rick Popson

Earlier this year we saw one of our longtime colleagues reach a milestone we all hope to achieve. After an outstanding 46-year career, including 24 years with us here at Harmonia, Counselor Rick Popson, LCSW-R, wrapped up his career and retired at the end of July 2021.

Rick supervised more than 20 individuals during his time with us, helping them achieve licensure while sharing his wealth of experience with the entire team. He ran our successful anger management group for more than 15 years – and was even our current CEO’s supervisor when she was a student!

We all wish him and his family many decades of fun and freedom to do whatever their hearts desire.

Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield of WNY is dedicated to improving the health and quality of life of the communities we serve – including urban, suburban and rural areas. The Blue Fund was proud to select Harmonia as a grant recipient because they work collaboratively to advance community-driven solutions that improve access to health care, ultimately enhancing the overall health of our region.

-Michael Ball
Director, Blue Fund,
Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield WNY
Board of Directors

Harmonia’s Board of Directors provides leadership, consultation, experience and talent that helps our team grow and improve at a meaningful and manageable pace. The result is an agency that provides superior client attention, service and value for all of our clients, partners and supporters, in addition to being worthy stewards of our donor and public funding dollars. Meet our full team at harmonia-care.org.

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How Can You Make a Difference?

Donors

Harmonia Collaborative Care is a not-for-profit organization that relies on donations and public funding to sustain the quality of services we provide, which directly or indirectly impact the lives of all of our neighbors. Please help us foster good mental health and independence in our community.

Your tax-deductible donation can be made at harmonia-care.org/donate, by calling 716.947.5025, or by mailing a check to:

Harmonia Collaborative Care
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Derby, NY 14047

Want to Join Us?

We want to be the first choice for behavioral health and senior care professionals — and we’re growing. At Harmonia, “life with balance” is more than just a tagline or even a goal for our clients. It’s a concept that’s every bit as important to our staff, and it’s engrained in our culture. Ask us about our approach to work-life balance, and visit harmonia-care.org/careers to see what positions we’re currently looking to fill. We regularly consider new board members as well.