



# Caring for Caregivers:

How VCA Offers Zero-barriers  
Mental Health Care with Lyra





Headquartered in Los Angeles, serving animal hospitals in every region in the U.S.



Animal hospital services



30,000 Employees

**F**ounded in 1986, Veterinary Centers of America, now known as VCA Animal Hospitals, was the first company of its kind to create a nationwide network of veterinary hospitals under a single entity. Prioritizing world-class care at a local level, VCA now operates more than 1,000 animal hospitals across the U.S.

At the heart of VCA is a culture of care and compassion—care for its furry patients and its

30,000 employees (referred to as associates). VCA prides itself on “feeling just like home,” with each hospital operating as a family; this family feel is a clear driving force behind VCA’s benefits philosophy.

As leaders in the veterinary space, VCA also wanted to lead in providing comprehensive benefits for its associates that encompass both their physical and mental health needs.

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VCA hospitals feel like families. And when you’re in a family, you take care of everyone. Our purpose at VCA is to take care of the future of veterinary medicine. As the largest provider of veterinary services, probably in the world, nothing could be more fundamental than taking care of our people. Not only is it a matter of taking care of their health care, their dental, their vision, but also their mental health.

— Maria Druse



## Challenge: Addressing the elephant in the room

"I've been in this profession for 25 years, and it's always been known that mental health is something that people in this industry have challenges with," said VCA Director of Associate Well-Being, Johanna Baldwin.

Similar to other caregiving professions, VCA associates experience compassion fatigue, burnout, anxiety, and depression due to the stressors they face every day—dealing with patients that are in distress and can't speak for themselves, and interacting with grieving clients whose companions are ill or dying.

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**Before we had Lyra, we were very well-intended, as many companies are. But we really weren't prepared to help our associates who had mental health needs, and really all of them do in different ways.**

— Maria Druse

In a [survey of 11,000 vets](#) across the country, researchers found that 9 percent of participants were struggling with high levels of psychological distress; 31 percent had experienced a depressive episode at some stage in their careers; and 17 percent reported suicidal ideation.

But when it came to helping associates address their mental health needs, VCA wanted to do more to expand on its legacy employee assistance program (EAP) which offered limited mental health support that was challenging to access. The EAP put the burden of finding a provider on an already stressed workforce, and only included a few sessions of counseling which was often not enough for a full recovery.

"When we started to envision a new way of providing access to mental health resources, we talked to Associates across the country and they told us that it often was difficult to find a provider in their area that could help them. If they did find someone, it might take a couple of months to see them, if at all," said Baldwin. "Legacy systems created barriers for our people to get the care they needed. That was really challenging because once you make the choice to reach out and ask for help, you should be able to access that help quickly."

VCA took this lack of accessible and effective mental health care as an opportunity to re-envision the resources it had and invest to eliminate any barriers that existed. "Frankly, I used to lose a lot of sleep because I worried about our employees and what they would do if they needed help," Druse recalled.

## Solution

In 2019, VCA's benefits team began the search for a new mental health benefits provider "who would be able to take care of our people the way we would if we could," said Druse.

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**We wanted expertise, quick attention, and zero barriers.**

— Maria Druse

### **A clear mental health partner emerges**

VCA took a boots-on-the-ground approach to its selection process, running a six-month pilot program with Lyra and two other mental health benefits providers across a subset of its workforce. After surveying associates, VCA chose Lyra as its mental health partner based on superior outcomes and employee satisfaction levels. Lyra has maintained that high bar with 91 percent of VCA members indicating they are satisfied or highly satisfied with the care they receive from Lyra today.

### **Care that doesn't clock out and is available on the go**

Since animal hospitals never close, associates work all hours, day or night. To support all VCA associates, Lyra provides round-the-clock mental health support, offering a frictionless sign-up process, online or over the phone, that instantly matches an associate with an available provider.

"With Lyra, the experience for our associates is easy," said Baldwin. "When they make the decision to get help, they can call and speak to someone 24 hours a day. They can also register online and take a quick assessment to be instantly matched with a coach or therapist that meets their needs. They have control and flexibility in finding care, and fast."

"Employees now have faster access to care than they ever had before. People tell us how great it is to just be able to go online and set up an appointment. It's really been a game changer for us."





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Ultimately, after going through our pilot, we chose Lyra because our associates overwhelmingly felt they were getting the attention they needed at the speed at which they needed it. The scores for Lyra were off the charts.

— Maria Druse

## A clear mental health partner emerges

"As a scientific and medical organization, it was important for us to look at evidence-based results when considering how to enhance our mental health care support," said Baldwin. Lyra's therapists and coaches solely provide evidence-based treatments (EBTs), methods that have been rigorously tested in randomized controlled trials and proven effective at reducing symptoms and improving overall functioning. Through comprehensive quarterly reports that include data such as the number of members who seek care, anonymized clinical outcomes, and client satisfaction rates, Lyra provides a clear picture of the care it's delivering to VCA associates. Meaningful, measurable symptom changes are tracked and analyzed through validated clinical measures, including the Patient Health

Questionnaire (PHQ-9) for depression and the Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7) for anxiety to validate patient outcomes and the effectiveness of care with Lyra.

## Seamless care at every stage of recovery

VCA first implemented Lyra as a reimaged EAP with a set amount of free sessions available for all associates and their dependents. Thanks to VCA associates' overwhelmingly positive response to Lyra, VCA doubled down on its commitment to mental health and integrated Lyra's services into its health care plan. As a result, associates can continue care beyond the sessions that VCA fully covers, requiring only a copay. This seamless experience and affordable cost is a significant benefit, especially for those who need additional care, such as medication or extended therapy for complex needs.



## Results

**2 days**

is the average wait time to a first available Lyra appointment for VCA employees, compared to 25 nationally

**9 in 10**

VCA employees improve or recover from their mental health conditions with Lyra, compared to just 4 in 10 nationally.

**91%**

of VCA employees who respond to Lyra's satisfaction survey are satisfied or highly satisfied

During an extended pilot with Lyra, VCA experienced meaningful improvement in care access and outcomes, which increases their confidence that they are well-equipped to support employees' mental health. VCA expanded their relationship with Lyra in late 2021 and gave every U.S. Associate access to company-paid sessions on the platform – regardless of whether or not the Associate worked full-time for the company's veterinary hospital network.

VCA's partnership with Lyra couldn't be better-timed. With Lyra, VCA was prepared to support its associates when the pandemic began just a few months later. Demand for pet care skyrocketed during that time, packing VCA animal hospitals with new paw parents, more patients, and even more stress for employees. VCA's benefits leaders say working with their previous EAP now seems unimaginable, and the consequences unthinkable.

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I was glad that we had already been working with Lyra and had resources in place for our associates before the pandemic. It really shined a light on the need to have mental health care. I really wouldn't ever want to work for a company again that didn't have these resources in place.

— Maria Druse

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Our associates have told us that in offering Lyra, it's making a difference to them. It's allowing them to feel better about themselves, about the work that they do. Our goal is that this will allow them to thrive in this profession for the long term.

—Johanna Baldwin

