

Virginia Partnership Launches First Delivery of Hypertension Medications to Patients via Medical Cargo Drones

Virginia's Eastern Shore benefits from Health Care project designed to advanced smart community technologies to improve transportation efficiency and safety.

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An innovative partnership of Virginia for-profit, non-profit, government and education organizations is proud to announce the successful launch of a groundbreaking healthcare initiative aimed at providing vital hypertension

medical supplies to patients within a 2-mile radius of Riverside Health System facilities on Virginia's Eastern Shore. The Elevating Health Care Access (EHCA) project was selected by the U.S. Department of Transportation's Strengthening Mobility and Revolutionizing Transportation

(SMART) Grants Program in April 2023, which provides grants to eligible public sector agencies to conduct demonstration projects focused on advanced smart community technologies to improve transportation efficiency and safety. The project marks a significant step forward in using drone technology to improve access to healthcare resources and enhance patient care by delivering medications straight to the patient's doorstep by drone. The team delivered three successful packages to three patients within two miles of Riverside Shore Memorial Hospital in Onancock, Virginia.

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Tracy Tynan, Director, Virginia Unmanned Systems Center at VIPC



This initiative is the collective efforts of DroneUp, Riverside

Health System, Virginia Institute for Spaceflight & Autonomy ([VISA](#)) at Old Dominion University (ODU), and the Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission (A-NPDC) and is funded

through the U.S. D.O.T. SMART Grants Program. The [Virginia Innovation Partnership Corporation \(VIPC\)](#) provided a \$75,000 grant for the project's initial funding, which enabled the team to jump start the exploration of use cases, concepts of operations, and Eastern Shore community engagement efforts.



This first round of medication deliveries comes less than six months after the SMART Grant was awarded in April 2023. The project was one of 59 proposals awarded out of a nationwide pool of 389 applications and the only application in the Commonwealth of Virginia to be awarded. After this successful first patient delivery, the team plans to demonstrate more extensive and further-distance delivery and beyond visual line of site operations, eventually delivering to remote Tangier Island in the middle of the Chesapeake Bay.

"We are very excited for the Eastern Shore," said Brayden and Luetta Tyler, residents of Onancock who took part in this pilot delivery. "There are so many people that live in underserved or areas where it's difficult to get medicines, so for them to be able to have something delivered instead of seeking transportation to get those, it would be great. We're also very happy that Riverside is looking into new, innovative ways to service that community."

Hypertension, or high blood pressure, is a common and potentially life-threatening condition that affects millions of individuals globally. Timely and consistent access to medications is necessary for managing this chronic condition effectively. Residents of Virginia's Eastern Shore have a higher prevalence of hypertension than the rest of the Commonwealth of Virginia, which is why this project is focused on reaching patients in this area. The initiative will help streamline the regular distribution of hypertension medical supplies to Riverside Health System patients, ensuring they receive the care they need promptly. DroneUp's delivery can carry supplies of up to 10 pounds and ensure they are delivered in an ongoing cadence, so patients are never without their prescription.

Key highlights of the initiative include:

Efficient and Timely Deliveries: DroneUp's advanced drone fleet delivered hypertension medications directly to patients' doorsteps within a 2-mile radius of Riverside Health System facilities. This ensures swift and efficient delivery, reducing wait times for patients.

Enhanced Patient Care: By eliminating transportation barriers and delays associated with traditional delivery methods, especially in the rural Eastern Shore area, this initiative allows patients to access critical medications, contributing to better health outcomes and improved

quality of life.

Cutting-Edge Technology: DroneUp's drones are equipped with state-of-the-art technology, including GPS navigation and real-time monitoring systems, to ensure safe and accurate deliveries.

Collaborative Partnership: DroneUp, Riverside Health System and their partners have worked closely together to develop this initiative, aligning its services with Riverside's commitment to enhancing patient care and access to medical resources.

Tom Walker, CEO of DroneUp, shared: "We are proud to launch this initiative in partnership with Riverside Health System as part of the SMART Grants Program. Drone technology will make healthcare more accessible, efficient, and patient-centric. Delivering hypertension medications is just the beginning of what we envision for the future of healthcare and drones. After this successful first patient delivery, the team plans to demonstrate more extensive and further distance delivery and beyond visual line of site operations (BVLOS), eventually delivering to remote Tangier Island in the middle of the Chesapeake Bay."

Nick Chuquin, President of Riverside Shore Memorial Hospital, added, "Ensuring our patients have access to their essential medications is a top priority for Riverside. This collaborative project helps to improve our patients' health and quality of life by increasing medication adherence and removing transportation barriers. We are also focused on safety in all aspects: keeping the medications safe, such as temperature ranges, chain of custody, and double checks to make sure the right patient gets the right medication."

The team is also focused on keeping the airspace safe, which has been a big part of working with the local flying community to make sure they are comfortable with notification systems when sharing the skies with drones.

VISA has been playing an important role in management, health outcomes Modeling & Simulation, and workforce development for the project. "We are so proud to be part of this great team and have the opportunity to improve patient outcomes on the Eastern Shore," said VISA's Executive Director Dr. David Bowles. VISA's Deputy Director John Costulis added, "This team is working closely with localities through the A-NPDC and our federal partners to complete this Stage 1 award by the end of 2024. When completed, this team is planning to operationalize medical package delivery across the entire Eastern Shore of Virginia, which will revolutionize a new transportation approach and access to healthcare."

"VIPIC supports the Elevating Health Care Access (EHCA) project because it is an innovative approach to reaching patients who have difficulty traveling to the hospital or pharmacy. As this project increases its coverage of the Eastern Shore, it will provide greater healthcare access to communities that are difficult to serve by traditional transportation methods, such as Tangier Island," Tracy Tynan, the Director of the Virginia Unmanned Systems Center at VIPIC said.

The medical drone delivery project on the Eastern Shore will improve the overall health care

experience for patients by delivering their prescription medication right to their doorstep. To learn more medical services offered by Riverside on the Eastern Shore, visit riversideonline.com.

For more information on the Elevating Health Care Access (EHCA) project, visit <https://visaatodu.org/elevating-health-care-access-project/>.

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