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Customer Case Study: VillageCare

NYC Long-Term Managed Care Plan Heals Itself of Data Silos and Reporting Discrepancies

VILLAGECARE

- **Industry:** Healthcare, Insurance
- **Headquarters:** New York City, USA
- **Interesting Fact:** Started as a community effort in the late 1970s to save the only nursing home serving NYC's West Village

Managing Complex Data from a Siloed Healthcare System

VillageCareMAX is a provider-based healthcare plan. They're part of VillageCare, a community-based, not-for-profit organization that has offered managed long-term care, post-acute healthcare, and community-based services to New Yorkers for more than 40 years. During the 1980s, VillageCare opened the first-in-the-nation nursing home for individuals living with HIV/AIDS. Today they continue to serve the city's most vulnerable population — those without private health insurance, and people with severe, long-term medical needs. Their goal is to keep their members out of the ER and hospital by providing cost-effective and patient-focused services through managed long-term care or community care settings.

Having the right data at the right time is crucial to coordinating patient services. According to Ku'uipo Curry, Director of IT Data Management at VillageCare, "There's no way we can manage our members or their complex conditions — or help them get the best outcomes — if we can't see and connect the data from all those different parts of the healthcare ecosystem."

Business Results

Usage:
> 15,000 catalog views each month reached in just 18 months

Increased Trust in Data: Alation created a single source of truth for reporting

Improved Collaboration: Lexicon provides a common language for business and IT

VillageCare had embarked on their "BE Vital" internal employee culture initiative, which included the goal of building a data-driven culture throughout the organization. Its aim was to use data and technology to improve organizational performance so that outcomes were based on factual data.

However, like much of the healthcare ecosystem, the siloed repositories of information stood in the way. They had multiple systems and data sources, data was siloed within teams, and they used Microsoft Excel spreadsheets for most reporting. Even when VillageCare implemented the use of Tableau Server for business intelligence (BI) reporting, people generated their own reports based on their favorite datasets.

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This proliferation of data sources and a general lack of understanding about their data led to reporting disparities, as folks based their reports on the wrong or inaccurate data. "People were fighting about math," says Curry. "And it wasn't necessarily that any of them were wrong. They were just using different data elements or different datasets and calculating things differently."

To overcome the disparities in siloed data, they began migrating key datasets to AWS Redshift. As they did so, they engaged First San Francisco Partners (FSFP) to evaluate their data governance maturity. FSFP recommended that they address significant governance issues such as multiple definitions for the same data, overlapping and conflicting datasets, and a penchant for siloed reporting. These could all be resolved by cataloging their metadata, creating a single business lexicon, and endorsing trusted data.

In other words, by implementing a data catalog.

Making Sense of Reams of Data

VillageCare chose the Alation Data Intelligence platform to help it resolve its governance and data cataloging issues. "We chose Alation because of its cost and speed; it started providing value in just three weeks!" says Curry. "We also

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chose it over other options because of its out-of-the-box compatibility with Redshift and Tableau."

To familiarize people throughout VillageCare with Alation, Curry's team held a hackathon to build a Lexicon in Alation from approximately 100 pages of terminology. Each person took one page and defined the terms on that page so the terms made sense to anyone reading them. "Once they were 'human readable' they were easy to search, so the hackathon sped up our ability to use Alation for data search and discovery."

VillageCare then focused their Right Start deployment efforts on a single dataset, involving everyone who used or even had opinions about it as they cataloged the data. Within three weeks, they had cataloged that first dataset and quickly moved on to others. As the number of datasets grew, so did the organization's understanding of their data. Diana Melnikov, Data Governance Manager at VillageCare, sums it up: "If you want to structure your data and understand your metadata, Alation is one of the best tools you can use."

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VillageCare has more than 64,000 datasets. In just 18 months, they cataloged 67 percent of their Amazon Redshift and MySQL datasets, and 60 percent of their Care Management data warehouse—even before the system went live! "When we turned around at the end of the first year and looked back at our original goals, we almost had to laugh at how simplistic our view was of what could be done in a year." notes Curry. "We accomplished all of our original goals within the first month or two of having Alation, and then went exponentially so much farther than that by the end of the year."

VillageCare decided to make Alation available to anyone in their data analytics team who wanted to use it. They started with 20 creator licenses and expanded to 80 almost overnight. Says Curry: "It was really interesting to see how quickly we had to get more Alation licenses. We tried to take some licenses back from people and they said, 'You really need to go get more money [for more licenses] because this is really helpful.'"

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The organization continues to focus on documenting as much of its data as possible in Alation. Per Curry, "Documentation is the key. The more that people document the data they're using, the more data-driven the company becomes."

Trusted Data Improves Decision-Making Confidence

Alation has helped VillageCare build internal confidence in their data, improve analyst productivity by reducing duplication of effort, and increase collaboration through better documentation of key AWS and internal data sources. "Alation helped us to establish a single language when sharing data," says Melnikov. "It ensures that we're using the same source of truth because now we can say, 'This data is good.'"

VillageCare measures its own success by the adoption and use of Alation for data discovery and reporting. They went from zero searches in Alation to more than 8,000 in less than six months and now see around 15,000 page views each month. Higher use of Alation generates further confidence in the data that people are using.
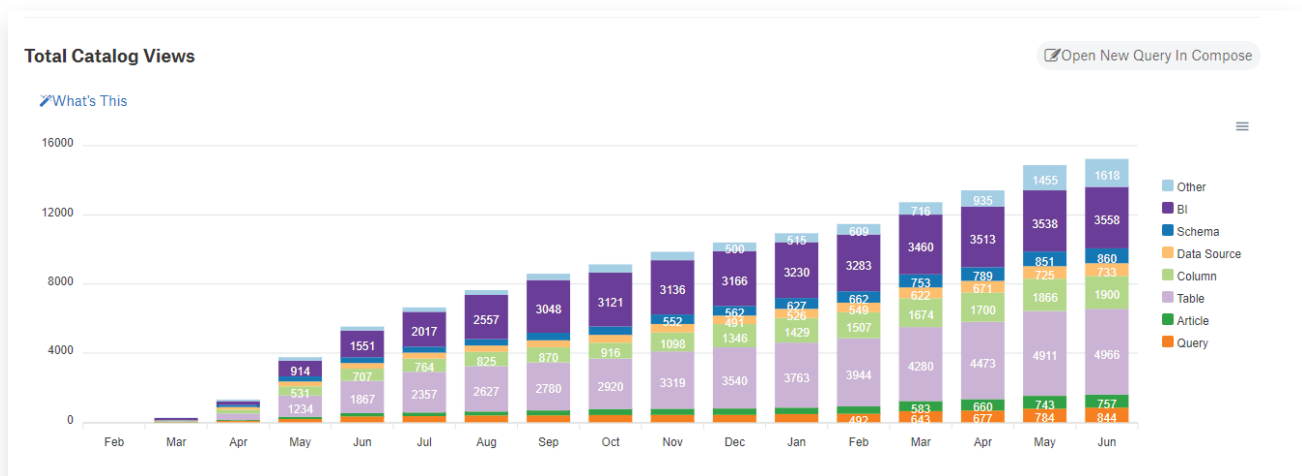
Alation Catalog Views at Village Care from March 2021 to June 2022.

As noted, VillageCare started seeing value from using Alation within three weeks. VillageCare uses Alation to document the organization's most critical data. In less than 18 months, they documented approximately two-thirds of their 64,000 data sets. Now people are confidently using the right data for the right purpose because it's cataloged in Alation.

"The analytics team is 100 percent confident," says Curry. "They're solid on where the data came from and what they're doing with it." They no longer get challenged on their data when presenting in meetings. Instead of fighting about math and data, teams can discuss whether the analysis itself is correct because they're confident they've got the right data.

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Alation is helping improve analyst productivity by reducing the number of Tableau reports created. Previously, whenever someone needed a report, the data analytics team would create one. Now, Alation holds an index and catalog of all those reports. "When someone says they need a new report, we tell them to check Alation to make sure it doesn't already exist or there's not something that's close that they can just edit," says Curry. "This has helped with a lot of re-work and saved the time, energy, and strife that it takes to come up with a new report every time." VillageCare also uses Alation to track which Tableau reports are most popular and well-used so they can recognize the folks who built them for their contribution to the company.

Finally, VillageCare is using Alation to break down the barriers between business and IT by helping everyone speak a common language. Because of its Google-like user interface, business users can now do their own searches in Alation. According to Melnikov: "They use Alation to become familiar with the table structure and find data elements. Then they can communicate and collaborate with IT much more effectively."

Trust, collaboration, and confidence in the data now drive decision-making at VillageCare. Today, Alation has a reserved seat at every working meeting. "Alation is the know-it-all in the room," concludes Curry. "It's a necessary

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presence in working meetings because we're all able to look at the data, and point to it, and think about it in a really productive way."

About VillageCare

VillageCare has been offering post-acute health care, community services, and managed health care options to New Yorkers for over 40 years. The organization serves more than 20,000 unique individuals annually through its managed care and community programs. They have continually reached out to hard-to-serve, vulnerable, and marginalized populations who may not have adequate access to quality health care and rehabilitative services.

Data Environment

- AWS S3
- AWS Redshift
- MySQL
- SQL Server
- Tableau