

Healthcare Workforce Strategic Plan Update

April 19, 2023



Primary Charge

Act 155 of 2020, An act relating to increasing the supply of nurses and primary care providers in Vermont, establishes that,

The Director of Health Care Reform in the Agency of Human Services shall maintain a current health care workforce development strategic plan that continues efforts to ensure that Vermont has the health care workforce necessary to provide care to all Vermont residents.

In maintaining the strategic plan, the Director or designee shall consult with an advisory group composed of the following 11 members, at least one of whom shall be a nurse, to develop and maintain the strategic plan.

Strategic Plan Advisory Committee

The advisory group membership consists of representatives from the following organizations:

- ▶ Green Mountain Care Board's Primary Care Advisory Group
- ▶ Vermont State Colleges
- ▶ Area Health Education Center's Workforce Initiative
- ▶ Federally Qualified Health Centers
- ▶ Vermont Hospitals
- ▶ Physicians
- ▶ Mental Health Professionals
- ▶ Dentists
- ▶ Naturopathic Physicians
- ▶ Home Health Agencies
- ▶ Long-term Care Facilities
- ▶ Director of Healthcare Reform
- ▶ Other subject matter experts from State government who participated in the Advisory Committee meetings but were not formal members: Blueprint for Health, Department of Labor, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Green Mountain Care Board, Office of Professional Regulation, Office of Rural Health and Primary Care.

Plan Overview

In 2021 the Advisory Committee explored a large range of topics and arrived at a comprehensive assessment of health care workforce development challenges and opportunities in the following areas:

- ▶ Coordination
- ▶ Data and Monitoring
- ▶ Financial Incentives
- ▶ Education and Training
- ▶ Regulation
- ▶ Practice
- ▶ Recruitment and Retention
- ▶ Federal Policy

The Strategic Plan Advisory Committee continues to meet regularly throughout the year to monitor the status of recommendations and discuss and coordinate on workforce issues.

Recommendations with Updates

Coordination of Workforce Development Activities in the State of Vermont

Recommendation	Action Required By:	Status	Notes
Integrate with State Workforce Development Board	State Workforce Development Board (SWDB) and AHS	Accomplished	AHS is currently partnering with the SWDB to host regular meetings of the Healthcare Workforce Strategic Plan Sub-Committee.

Data and Monitoring

Recommendation	Action Required By:	Status	Notes
Identify lead state entity as health care workforce data hub	Interagency Task Team	Accomplished	Act 183 of 2022 provided funding for AHS Central Office to hire a Workforce Data Center Manager. Recruitment is currently in progress.
Employ Supply and Demand Modeling	Health care workforce data hub	In Progress	From Act 183, the Department of Labor “shall explore and recommend ... a process, methodology, and necessary funding amounts to establish and maintain the capacity to perform health care supply and demand modeling ...” The Department is working on this reporting requirement and anticipates completion this quarter.

Financial Incentives

Recommendation	Action Required By:	Status	Notes
Broaden Loan Repayment to more professional types	AHEC	Accomplished	Act 183 of 2022 created loan repayment opportunities for: physician assistants, medical technicians, child psychiatrists, primary care providers and nurses. It also continued funding for the Vermont Nursing Forgivable Loan Incentive Program, created the Nurse Faculty Forgivable Loan Incentive Program, and created the Mental Health Professional Forgivable Loan Incentive Program. These programs are currently in the final stages of being implemented. Primary care funding was extended but not expanded.
Make financial assistance options for the health care workforce clear, transparent, and easy to find.	VSAC, regional training programs, employers	In Progress	VDH has created a website that lists Loan Repayment and Scholarship programs. Efforts are underway to add more information and make it easier to access.
Identify financial barriers to the recruitment and retention of the non-licensed workforce.	State Interagency Task Team	In Progress	Reporting required for AHS's Premium Pay for Workforce Recruitment and Retention Program will be reviewed to identify financial barriers. In addition, rate studies were completed by DVHA and submitted to the Legislature.
Recommend one-time funds for employers to attract permanent employees.	State Interagency Task Team	Accomplished	Act 83 of 2022 created the Recruitment and Retention Program; there have now been two rounds of funding for providers to help them retain staff.

Education

Recommendation	Action Required By:	Status	Notes
Increase enrollment in nursing programs.	OPR, Schools of Nursing, clinical sites/health care organizations, VDH	In Progress	Act 183 of 2022 created Emergency interim grants to Vermont's nursing schools over three years to increase compensation for faculty/staff to support recruitment and retention and thereby increased enrollment.
Strengthen incentives for preceptors for all professions.	Department of Healthcare Reform and Stakeholders	In Progress	Act 183 of 2022 as amended by Act 3 of 2023 created incentive grants to nurses employed by health care employers in Vermont for serving as preceptors for nursing students enrolled in VT nursing school programs. These incentive grants are in the final stage of development and should be open to applicants in 2023 Q2. Act 183 also directed the Director of Health Care Reform to convene a working group of stakeholders to identify ways to increase clinical placement opportunities; establish sustainable funding models for compensating nurses as preceptors, hiring additional nurses to alleviate pressure on preceptors, or both; and develop an action plan for expanding clinical placement opportunities. The Action Plan was presented to the Legislature in January 2023.

Education Cont.

Recommendation	Action Required By:	Status	Notes
<p>Explore opportunities to expand family practice residency programs.</p>	<p>UVM College of Medicine</p>	<p>In Progress</p>	<p>Lamoille Health Partners received \$495,000 from the Teaching Health Center Planning and Development program to help them create a three-year statewide residency program specializing in primary care. There will be 10 spots by 2025. SVMC continues to pursue family medicine residency opportunities with Dartmouth Health and Cheshire Medical Center in Keene, hoping to begin actual placements in Bennington in 2026.</p>
<p>Modify curriculum to introduce primary care earlier in medical school.</p>	<p>UVM College of Medicine</p>	<p>In Progress</p>	<p>The UVM College of Medicine has curricular and extra-curricular programming that exposes students to career opportunities in primary care, and careers serving underserved populations.</p>
<p>Advertise and recruit for existing apprenticeship opportunities supported by the Department of Labor.</p>	<p>DOL</p>	<p>In Progress</p>	<p>The Department of Labor is currently working with CCV, Vermont Tech, and Vermont HiTech on developing apprenticeship opportunities in healthcare occupations. While the Department does not directly promote and advertise these opportunities, the Department helps support those employers and training providers through funding and offers career pathway support to the customers served through the Department's workforce programs.</p>

Education Cont.

Recommendation	Action Required By:	Status	Notes
<p>Develop and identify strategies to streamline advancement through the nursing career ladder and upskill existing staff.</p>	<p>Vermont State Colleges</p>	<p>In Progress</p>	<p>The Health Care Employer Nursing Pipeline and Apprenticeship Program created by Act 183 of 2022 provides grants to health care employers to establish or expand partnerships with Vermont nursing schools to create nursing pipeline or apprenticeship programs, or both, to train members of health care employers' staff to become higher-level nursing professionals. This program is currently under development and should open to applicants in 2023 Q2. In addition, the Vermont Business Roundtable Foundation is working on roll out a Nursing Apprenticeship Pipeline model across Vermont health care providers. This model focuses on an employer-led apprenticeship, utilizes the LNA - LPN-RN Apprenticeship training via CCV/VTSU, builds a sustainable financial loan repayment tool via VSAC which encourages retention, seeks to scale and expand clinical education through cooperative joint appointments for practicing nurses, and provides significant wraparound supports for participants.</p>

Recruitment and Retention

Recommendation	Action Required By:	Status	Notes
Inventory and highlight state programs that support recruitment and retention of health care professionals.	State Interagency Task Team, DOL	In Progress	VDH created a loan repayment and scholarship website. ADVANCE VT and AHEC have resources as well.
Modify or expand programs that support working and living in Vermont.	State Interagency Task Team, ACCD	In Progress	Worker relocation program expanded to include all types of health care professionals. The State of Vermont, in collaboration with the University of Vermont and the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation (VSAC), is offering a \$5000 loan repayment program to incentivize and retain new graduates from Vermont colleges and universities.
Create marketing campaign to promote health care careers in Vermont.	ACCD, State Interagency Task Team, regional health care recruitment centers	In Progress	Health care careers and information for health care professionals has been highlighted on "Think Vermont".

Recruitment and Retention Cont.

Recommendation	Action Required By:	Status	Notes
Develop a cross system strategy to utilize Section 9817 of the American Rescue Plan Act.	AHS	In progress	AHS is utilizing Section 9817 funding to implement initiatives designed to support the Medicaid HCBS, mental health, and substance use disorder workforce. Through the Premium Pay for Workforce Recruitment and Retention Program, AHS anticipates providing a total of \$25M in grant funding to HCBS providers to distribute premium pay to current and new employees who make a service commitment to the organization. The Agency is also using Section 9817 to fund trainings for HCBS providers. In addition, AHS will utilize Section 9817 funding to offer a number of grant opportunities designed to strengthen and enhance the HCBS system of care in Vermont. These grants will be made available to HCBS providers and community-based organizations that serve individuals who utilize HCBS. The Agency is currently working to define these grant opportunities, which will include funding related to workforce recruitment, retention, and training.
Support Organizational Wellness and Peer Support Programs	Director of Trauma Prevention and Resilience Development, DMH, employers	In Progress	The Director of Trauma Prevention and Resilience Development is currently providing peer support meetings after critical incidents and as needed by AHS, as well as creating and providing trainings on self-care, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, trauma and resilience to State of Vermont Employees, community partners, Vermonters, AOE, and others. The Director acts as a consultant about these topics to SOV, community partners, and general public. The Director is consulting with Invest EAP as they create a Workplace Resilience Certification.
Reduce Administrative Burden	Legislature	In Progress	Act 167 of 2022 included several points that addressed administrative burden related to prior authorizations. Current bill H220 also contains language on exemptions from prior authorizations.

Practice Changes

Recommendation	Action Required By:	Status	Notes
Maximize Medicare Flexibility and reimbursement through Vermont's All-Payer ACO Agreement	AHS, GMCB	In Progress	Vermont proposed for Medicare to recognize and reimburse licensed mental health and substance use disorder treatment professionals to expand the number of MH/SUD providers who can treat and bill for Medicare patients. New Medicare billing rules allow for licensed professionals to bill Medicare under General physician supervision instead of Direct physician supervision. Vermont likely to propose additional waivers to allow less restricted Medicare payment for skilled nursing care delivered in the home.
Develop commercial reimbursement models for audio-only services	DFR	In Progress	Health insurers are required to cover audio-only services under 8 V.S.A. § 4100. Under Act 6 of 2021, the Department has issued orders setting fee-for-service reimbursement for audio only services, with the eventual goal of rolling this modality into a capitated payment model.
Expand telehealth coverage	DVHA	In Progress	Health insurers are required to cover telehealth with reimbursement at parity with in-person services under 8 V.S.A. § 4100k.
Make telehealth billing requirements clear.	DFR	In Progress	VPQHC is working on organizing information about billing requirements.
Establish a statewide telepsychiatry program in Emergency Departments	DMH, VAHHS	In progress	In September 2022, VPQHC received a \$901,123 Congressionally Directed Spending grant from Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to support coordination of the Vermont Emergency Telepsychiatry Network (VETN). The project supports Vermont Emergency Departments in caring for people seeking emergency mental health services.

Regulatory Changes

Recommendation	Action Required By:	Status	Notes
Advertise and promote the Fast Track for health care professional licensure for all OPR regulated professions.	OPR, healthcare employers, ACCD	In Progress	
Consider reducing licensing barriers for telehealth practice, taking into account recommendations of the workgroup created by Act 21 of 2021.	OPR, Legislature	In Progress	OPR and Board of Medical Practice in rulemaking process to create telehealth licensure and registration options; likely to be live by late-summer/fall 2023.

Additional Recommendations

Financial Incentives

Recommendation	Action Required By:	Status	Notes
Increase scholarship funding created by Act 155 of 2020 and identify permanent funding source.	State Interagency Task Team	No Change	These are still funded year to year from global commitment funds. Their renewal is being considered in the Legislature again this year.
Revisit tax incentive proposals.	State Interagency Task Team, Legislature	No Change	Proposed in Governor's SFY 23 Budget; not accepted by the Legislature.
Consider longer-term grant incentive program.	State Interagency Task Team	No Change	
Evaluate the effectiveness of the existing scholarship program available to Vermonters who attend dental school.	VDH, AHEC, VSAC	No Change	VDH plans to study the retention rate for the dental scholarships in the coming year.

Education

Establish a physician assistant education program.	Action Required By:	Status	Notes
Establish a physician assistant education program.	Vermont State Colleges, Legislature	No Change	
Modify curriculum to prepare students for work in interdisciplinary teams across the continuum of care.	Vermont State Colleges	No Change	
Advance a coordinated approach to promote health care careers in K-12 educational settings.	AHEC	No Change	
Ensure that health care career education is offered to all students before leaving middle school.	AOE	No Change	Many youth and adult career technical education programs are delivering LNA or Medical Assistant certification; with college nursing pre-requisites.
Support transition-to-practice programs for professional roles.	State Interagency Task Team	No Change	Governor's 2022 BAA proposal included \$1M to fund transition-to-practice programs for new hires; not accepted by the Legislature.

Recruitment and Retention

Recommendation	Action Required By:	Status	Notes
Promote health care careers to New Vermonters.	Office of Refugee Resettlement	No Change	There are programs in place to connect New Vermonters to careers that suit their skills and interests, but no new initiatives specifically aimed at healthcare workforce

Regulatory Changes

Recommendation	Action Required By:	Status	Notes
Differentiate Canadian health care workers from international health care workers and create an expedited path to licensure.	OPR	No Change	Some Canadian healthcare workers are already differentiated, with the OPR Bridge licensure rules.
Evaluate further opportunities to remove barriers to licensure for Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder treatment professionals.	OPR	No Change	
Consider temporarily waiving licensure fees for "first time" Licensed Nursing Assistants (LNA).	State Interagency Task Team, OPR	No Change	OPR would need a new funding stream to replace fees. In the meantime, VSAC has a fund - Vermont Trades Scholarship Forgivable Loan Program - that offers Vermont and non-Vermont residents funding for tuition, initial licensing fees, and exam fees for qualified recipients who enroll in high-need trades training and certificate programs.