



Date: August 12, 2024
To: Green Mountain Care Board
From: Vermont Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence
Charlie Gliserman, Director of Policy
Re: Public Comment, Act 167 and State Recommendations for Hospital Transformation

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the health care delivery impacts of the state-level recommendations for hospital transformation.

As Vermont's leading voice on domestic and sexual violence, the Vermont Network works to promote policies that support victims and survivors of violence to thrive and live lives free from violence.

Hospitals are an essential component of the system of care for survivors of domestic and sexual violence, child abuse, and child neglect. To reduce health disparities in Vermont, survivors must have access to the health care they need, including trauma-informed forensic medical care.

The Vermont Network houses and manages the Vermont Forensic Nursing Program (VFNP). Forensic nurses are trained to provide specialized and trauma-informed medical care, collect and document forensic evidence, and provide referrals for follow-up care after a survivor experiences domestic abuse, sexual assault, or child abuse. Vermont's 90+ forensic nurses provide approximately 400 exams in 16 hospitals annually.

Vermont's Survivors Bill of Rights (V.S.A. 13 § 3281) includes a right to free and timely medical examination and evidence collection for victims of sexual assault. However, in rural areas, the geographic distance to a credentialed and available forensic nursing provider can delay or even prohibit access to this care. Research clearly documents that people who have experienced sexual or domestic violence are more likely to experience a wide range of short and long term physical and mental health impacts, leading to increased health care costs. In addition, access to a forensic nurse increases the likelihood that patients are offered and accept recommended services.¹

As the Green Mountain Care Board contemplates significant changes to Vermont's health care system, we must not further compromise access to forensic nursing care, particularly in the most underserved regions of our state. This includes ensuring that this vital service is preserved and supported to ensure local or regional access to care for victims of violence.

In addition, we appreciate the recommendations' attention to social determinants of health, including housing and transportation, which acutely impact survivors.

¹ Hollender M, Almirol E, Meyer M, Bearden H, Stanford KA. Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners Lead to Improved Uptake of Services: A Cross-Sectional Study. West J Emerg Med. 2023 Sep;24(5):974-982.



When survivors cannot access physical and mental health treatment and preventative care, it leads to delayed care, overutilization of emergency rooms, and greater health impacts and costs. Addressing these barriers are critical to achieving the objectives outlined in Act 167, bringing Vermont one step closer to a health care system that work for everyone.

Thank you for taking these comments into consideration. Please contact Charlie Gliserman at charlie@vtnetwork.org with any questions.