

Rural Health Services Task Force
UNAPPROVED DRAFT Meeting Notes
September 19, 2019

Members Present:

Kevin Mullin, Board Member, GMCB (designee for Robin Lunge)
John Olson, Chief, State Office of Rural Health & Primary Care, VT Dept. of Health
Mike Fisher, Office of the Health Care Advocate
Steve Gordon, President & CEO, Brattleboro Memorial Hospital
Dan Bennett, President and CEO, Gifford Medical Center
Tony Morgan, Executive Director, The Rutland Free Clinic
Dillon Burns, Director, Mental Health Services of Vermont Care Partners
Kate Burkholder, LADC, Treatment Associates, Inc
Laura Pelosi, Vermont Health Care Association
Jill Olson, Executive Director, VNAs of Vermont
Dr. Melissa Volansky, MD, Stowe Family Practice, Executive Medical Director, CHSLV

Absent Members:

Robin Lunge, Green Mountain Care Board
Ena Backus, Director of Health Care Reform, Agency of Human Services
Dr. Paul Parker, Richmond Pediatric & Adolescent Medicine
Dr. Rick Barnett, Licensed Psychologist-Doctorate, Licensed Alcohol/Drug Counselor

Public Present:

Mary Anne Sheehan, Vermont Talent Pipeline; Lucie Garand, Downs Rachlin Martin PLLC, Toby Howe, Downs Rachlin Martin PLLC; Devon Green, VP of Government Relations, VAHHS; Sarah Teachout, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Vermont; Helen Labun, Director, Vermont Public Policy, Bi-State Primary Care; Julie Tessler, Vermont Care Partners; Thifeed WaheedDeen, Office of Congressman Peter Welch; Debora Teixeira, Oral Health Program Administrator, VDH

I. Minute Approval

The Task Force approved minutes from the August 9, 2019 meeting.

II. Workforce Discussion

Taskforce member Laura Pelosi presented materials related to healthcare workforce challenges and opportunities. The presentation included statistics demonstrating the healthcare workforce crisis in Vermont, a summary of ongoing workforce efforts to address workforce issues and recommendations. The Task Force discussed specific workforce challenges related to recruitment and retention, licensing and provider incentives. Laura presented several recommendations which the Taskforce discussed:

- **Increase Loan Repayment via AHEC Program:** Total funding for AHEC has been level since FY12. As federal funds have increased, State support has correspondingly decreased. AHEC loan repayment funding for FY20 totals \$999,740- \$250,000 from Federal funds and \$749,740 from State funds. AHEC funding has largely been allocated to MDs and APRNs. Vermont's total maximum award to physicians is \$20,000/year for up to two years. Compared to neighboring states, Vermont's total program appropriation and the per recipient amount rank near the bottom.
- **Tax incentives:** State tax credit for health care workforce, potentially modeled after Maine and Oregon's tax credit programs. Maine's "Opportunity Tax Credit" program offers tax credits to Maine residents graduating from any institution. The tax credit is based on the amount the resident owes in loans each month. Oregon offers a \$5,000 tax credit to physicians, physician's assistants and nurse practitioners practicing in a rural setting. The Taskforce expressed interest in applying a State tax credit broadly to several health care workforce sectors.

- **Licensing, regulatory and administrative reforms:** The Taskforce discussed several options, including streamlining credential process for master’s level mental health substance abuse clinicians, expansion of military medic bridge/apprenticeship programs, requiring Vermont to join the Interstate Nurse Licensure Compact, expand access to telehealth, streamline quality and reporting measures across payer and options to reduce prior authorizations.
- **Educational initiatives:** The Taskforce discussed several options, including reimbursement for preceptors, modifications to nurse instructor regulations, lowering the minimum age for LPN program participation to 17, expand access to online education and align credentialing requirements with online educational programs.
- **Prioritize health care sector for state workforce funding:** The Taskforce discussed several options, including VTDOL training funds and recruitment initiatives, Vermont Workforce Development Board initiatives, registered apprenticeship program and State supported targeted marketing and recruitment.
- **Immigration related solutions:** The Taskforce discussed establishing a State “hub” for assisting employers/employees with processing employment-based VISAs, modifications to the VISA program, raising the H-2B Cap and initiatives to recruit “New Americans.”

The Taskforce discussed strategic differences among the options, including the pros and cons of a State spending option, i.e. loan repayment, versus a State revenue option, i.e. tax incentives. Similarly, the Taskforce discussed interest in providing a variety of recommendations, including monetary, non-monetary solutions, legislative and non-legislative options. The Taskforce discussed loan repayment and tax incentives at length, and generally supported all recommendations as meriting further discussion.

The Taskforce discussed voting procedure and final recommendations, specifically whether voting topic-by-topic on a rolling basis might preclude future topics. The Group agreed that identifying priority areas on a rolling basis would not limit future discussions, and that identifying consensus on an ongoing basis will promote decision making, delegation of research and help the Group meet deadlines.

III. Next Steps

The next Taskforce meeting is scheduled for October 8th in Room 10 of the state house.

The Taskforce would like to continue discussing Workforce recommendations, and potentially vote on areas of consensus.