

## Health Care Workforce Strategic Plan Advisory Group - Minutes

Wednesday, November 20, 2024, 10:00 AM

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**Attendees:** Suzanne Tremblay, Jessa Barnard, Anne Bilodeau, Betsy Hassan, Rebecca Kapsalis, Sherry Callahan, Stephanie Pagliuca, Luca Fernandez, Mary Kate Mohlman, Jerry Baake, Caitlin Stover, Elizabeth Cote, Maureen Hebert, Helen Labun, Beth Demers, MaryAnne Sheahan

### **Welcome and Introductions:**

Suzanne opened the meeting with a welcome to our new attendee and with a moment of reflection on current affairs and the feelings across the Health Care sector.

### **Core Purpose Exercise- 5 Why's:**

We moved into an exercise to assist in creating the Committee's "why" statement. Keeping in mind the questions, why do we exist and what do we care deeply about we individually asked ourselves what is our why? Then we asked why it matters while continuing to ask and narrowing it down to our core why. See responses below:

- Developing shared vision for transformative change takes collaboration and consensus
- We are doing what is right for our businesses, our patients, our community, and our region.
- Ensuring the health of all VT citizens.
- Stealing from AHEC--in the end, I believe this group's purpose is to support access to health care for all people (VT).
- Creating a group of individuals committed to all communities in Vermont and ensuring equity in resources, health care workforce, and health care.
- Vermonters need access to comprehensive primary and preventive care for the sake of their and their family's well-being.
- Addressing the workforce shortage in VT- Access to services- Community wellbeing- Public health- Disease prevention.
- Individuals and communities deserve to be healthy and live fulfilled lives supported by access to primary and preventive health care and support services.
- Healthy and sustainable society (population health in VT).

### **Aspirations Exercise- 5 What's:**

We continued to our next exercise, which was to reflect on the "What", what we will achieve, what the future looks like, what is important to us and created "wouldn't it be fantastic" statements for years 1, 3 and 5. See responses below:

- Healthcare professionals form the backbone of our healthcare system. We rely on their expertise, dedication, and compassion to protect and ensure the health and well-being for Vermont Communities.
- 2025: health care professionals (of all categories) were major participants in health care reform efforts; the Legislature continued to invest in innovative funding of health care professional workforce development opportunities

- Wouldn't it be great if Vermont committed to providing affordable and accessible training programs for its citizens - to serve the healthcare needs of our communities.
- 2025 - Had a detailed plan of action for the next five years along with measurements identified.
- Grow our own- with an accessible, accelerated and affordable pathway to careers in healthcare
- ...if we have built the framework for a new sustainable workforce model (in one profession) that we can all agree on, leveraging the talents and abilities of our collective organizations.
- 2025- Data driven workforce planning; 2028- sustainable workforce development; 2030- retention strategies and solving for workforce shortage
- RETENTION!
- 2025 - we had agreement/plans for bringing partners closer together who support and address the training, recruitment and retention of health professionals for Vermont.
- 2028: the Committee has been established as a working Committee that provides continual evaluation and program redesign related to best practices and innovation; continual involvement and consultation with the Legislature for recommendations; served as a resource for the State and communities to provide feedback to ongoing workforce initiatives
- 2028 - We saw a difference in our VT workforce stats where we are truly attracting candidates.
- 2030: offers continuing education and robust website
- 2028 - the partnership is strong and a system for training and supporting the recruitment and retention of health professionals for Vermont is helping build and deploy the workforce. Health professionals feel supported.

**Crafting our message in response to ACT 167 concerns:** We broke into 3 smaller groups to respond to constituent concern about the recommendations from the Oliver Wyman report. 3 problem statements were identified at the previous meeting that members wanted to address: **1.** The Workforce are concerned about their jobs; **2.** The provider groups & organizational leaders are concerned recruiting will be difficult given the implications of the report; **3.** Highly specialized professionals feel fungible. Suzanne asked the groups to pull up the Health Care Reform FAQ and use their “why” and “what” statements to assist in their responses to the concerns. [Health Care Transformation | Agency of Human Services FAQ](#). See responses below:

**Group #1 Workforce are concerned about their jobs:**

The team reported that their discussion focused on the need for resources, being mindful and present in conversation and to respond from a place of empathy for the situation they're in or concern someone brings forth. It was suggested that we prepare ourselves with a variety of resources for health professionals to help them find other job opportunities, to familiarize ourselves with other openings around the state, with other career pathway programs, for referrals and connecting people with placement services. They talked about the fact that there are many jobs and to communicate that we want to keep our workers in Vermont.

It was mentioned that it's also an opportunity to encourage people to get involved. Informing the person about how important our rural health system is and to become involved in. Whether that's lending their voice to a community meeting, participating in community efforts, familiarizing themselves with something legislative, or getting involved with their statewide professional organization if their profession has one. We live in a state where community

engagement is important, welcomed and that their voice will be heard. Vermont is a good place to live and work.

**The question was asked: Is there a centralized place we could help direct people to that might help them?** A portal or site, people could also explore training and development opportunities. Suzanne added that she has been exploring what other states are doing for this and am leaning toward developing something like New Hampshire's website where they have a central clearing house for linking out to and referencing a variety of resources like we are talking about here. [Healthcare Workforce Collaborative](#) | [HealthForce NH](#) | [New Hampshire](#). In the meantime, please use the Vermont Department of Health's Workforce Development landing page: [Workforce Development](#) | [Department of Labor](#) and Suzanne will continue to inventory resources and note this conversation.

**#2 Provider groups/organizational leaders are concerned recruiting will be difficult:**

The second group reported that they had reached a point of articulated uncertainty. Summing that the report and recommendations should not have come to anyone's surprise as the issues reported on have been known for some time. It did not report on anything that has not already been identified as a problem, like recruitment issues. What we cannot do is to continue to allow it to precipitate, they said. The big issues like housing, broadband, rural transportation have been known things we need to solve because those big things are the details that impact hospitals and implemented through the hospital budgeting process. It was unclear to the group how to respond to the concern as they were unsure of what the actual impact would be of the report response when held up against all the other external factors that are already making this so difficult.

*-Suzanne phrased a possible response: We certainly appreciate your concern and understand recruitment has been and may continue to be an issue. The report highlights the issues we have known for some time to be damaging the viability of our Health Care System, and we cannot afford to allow the same problems to continue. Identifying which of the recommendations will be feasible and necessary to make our system more sustainable, higher quality, more equitable, and affordable will be instrumental in our recruitment and retention efforts.*

**#3 Highly specialized professionals feel fungible (interchangeable):**

*Highly specialized professionals are far from exchangeable rather they are in high demand from the trending labor shortages and the backbone of our Health Care System. We value and rely on their expertise, dedication, and compassion to protect and ensure the health and well-being of our communities.*

Group 3 reported next and discussed the importance of valuing people and how a culture of good jobs is going to be important in the future. We already have situations of burnout and overload from worker shortages. What we're seeing next are the removal of procedures. And the effect that that will have on our communities is economic in multiple ways. People who require certain procedures will need to leave the area. This and other situations stem from the use of travelers. Where we bring people in, we pay them more and we give them housing and limit our options for clinical placements. And so, the people who do this work on a regular basis are paid less, do more and must find their own housing. It's a strain on the systems and the

communities. Another concern is the lose of training. For example, if Psychiatric care at CVMC is removed where will we get the clinical experiences for our training systems? So, a lot of this, is a situation that if we don't do something, we're going to be in a much worse situation. They reiterate that they strongly feel like the transformation to a good jobs culture is going to have to be at the core of the work ahead.

It was added that it's a cyclical process and problem that we need to break, and it started well before this report. A participant thanked Group 3 for bringing up the training implications and suggested we add valuing medical education and training to our list and address the long-term importance of training health care professionals in our state and recognizing the impacts both for the future of our workforce and for our patients if we do not. If training in Vermont is no longer available, we run the risk of losing our options for clinical placement advancing the issues. This is something for this group to keep in mind and watch for, not just for the existing workforce implications, but the pipeline and training implications of some of the recommendations are important. It was also added that it's very important for Vermont to value research and innovation to be an attractive workplace.

**AHEC Funding Requests:** A member had asked for a recap of AHECS's funding requests to support them during this legislative session. It was reviewed. AHEC is asking for a significant investment in early pipeline development. They are also asking for a significant increase in educational loan repayment. The increase is mostly to replace some of the onetime money from the COVID relief funding with a little more added to make up for flat funding over the years. It also will allow AHEC to continue to fund programs for nurse faculty and loan repayment for medical lab professionals. They would like to add other programs but can't add more if the funding remains flat or is decreased. The request is specifically for AHEC educational loan repayment and doesn't include the funding administered by VSAC. Some of the different incentive scholarships and loan forgiveness programs are a separate conversation. This loan repayment program includes Physicians, NP's, PA's, LPN's, RN's and Dentists. And for the physician workforce it's mostly geared toward primary care specialties, as well as psychiatry, and includes family medicine, internal medicine, adult primary care, Pediatrics and OBGYN and psychiatry. For the 2025 loan to payment cycle, there will not be a nurse faculty program because that funding is ending at the end of this year and there is no replacement funding for it in the 2025 cycle. We are seeking to put it back in.

The question was raised, will AHEC move into the adult space? And was answered that it has not historically been AHEC's primary focus. There's a lot still to do with high school, middle school, and undergraduate students but we are starting to move a little more into adult services. Some of the resources developed; workshops, online pop-up workshops or our Vt Health careers website are available for all ages. It's hard to move into that area or to do new innovative things when the state funding has been the same since 2006.

A participant asked if the nurse faculty money gets fully used and Luca responded. VSAC has owned the nurse Faculty scholarship funding and has made two awards so far, which is typical for the first year of a VSAC scholarship program. All the spending from the new VSAC programs from last year were one time and we gave them two years. They have another year to spend down the funding. There's about \$460,000 out of the \$500,000 left.



Luca continued that his team is working with the health department on the 2025 educational loan repayment grant document that allows them to administer the program and move forward. For several years we've had two-year grant projects, and the state has opted to move back to a one-year cycle, which makes it more challenging to plan. A participant asked if we should feel confident that the funding will be there because the state seems to be tightening the belt which given the value on investment of this program would be unfortunate. Luca responded to the concern in stating that he believes there is an opportunity to bring it up with the Commissioner's Office.

**Wrap Up and Next Steps:**

The next committee meeting will be on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, from 10-11am. We will have a presentation from the Vermont Talent Pipeline: Employer-driven demand – resulting in deliverable solutions- Mary Sheahan and Abby Stevens, a review of Shortage Designations by Luca Fernandez and will further identify our Mission, Vision & Values.

Happy Holiday's

Meeting adjourned.

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Respectfully submitted by Suzanne Tremblay  
Health Care Workforce Development Director