

**HOUSE HEALTH CARE  
&  
SENATE HEALTH AND WELFARE  
JOINT COMMITTEE MEETING  
JANUARY 11, 2024**

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# HOW ARE FQHCS DIFFERENT?

- We provide care to all, regardless of ability to pay.
- We cannot discriminate based on income level or insurance type/status (we must accept Medicaid and those who are uninsured).
- We are required to provide a financial discount program to ensure affordable care.
- We care for the sickest patients, with the most limited resources, the highest co-morbidities, and the greatest need for enabling services (transportation, translation, interpretation).
- **THIS IS OUR MISSION.** This is what the Community Health Center movement set out to do. But, providing care to this population has a higher cost.

# BATTENKILL VALLEY HEALTH CENTER

- One site, with two buildings in the village of Arlington.
- We serve 4,085 unique patients from 108 towns in VT, NY, MA.
- Payer mix:
  - Medicare: 30%
  - Medicaid: 29%
  - Private: 38%
  - Uninsured: 3%

38.1% of Bennington County is living below 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL)<sup>1</sup>.

**In CY2022, 48.4% of BVHC patients with known incomes were living with incomes at or below 200% of the FPL<sup>2</sup>.**

- What are we doing?
  - BVHC provides a sliding fee discount program to all patients living at or below 200% of FPL.
  - Using funds from Friends of Bernie, BVHC established an expanded sliding fee program for dental care up to 400% of FPL.

## 25.6% of Bennington County residents are enrolled in the SNAP program<sup>3</sup>.

- What are we doing?
  - BVHC, in partnership with the Vermont Food Bank, piloted a “Grab and Go” version of Veggie Van Go. This has been extremely successful. In FY2023, 1,681 bags of food were distributed.
  - BVHC has food shelves in each waiting room, funded by a private donor, and supported by the Arlington Food Shelf. In FY2023, BVHC distributed 4,635 pounds of food to our patients.
  - BVHC is a distribution site for Grateful Hearts, a 100% volunteer run program, providing fresh and frozen, heart healthy meals to community members at no cost.

**Bennington County's mentally unhealthy days per month, suicide rate, and overdose mortality rates are higher than the Vermont and National averages<sup>4,5,6</sup>.**

- What are we doing?
  - In July 2018 BVHC launched a mental health program with the help of a HRSA service expansion grant, employing 1 therapist. Today we have 4 therapists, a psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner, and a 1-day/week Blueprint therapist.
  - All of our medical providers (5) and our Psych NP can prescribe Suboxone for treatment of opioid use disorder.
  - We have partnered with Southwestern Vermont Medical Center and United Counseling Services to deploy Woebot, an AI counselor available through an app on any smart-phone, for at-risk teens.

## **Access to oral health care in Bennington County, for those enrolled in Medicaid, is extremely limited.**

- What are we doing?
  - In May 2017 BVHC opened a dental clinic. Five days/week, BVHC provides access to high quality oral healthcare, regardless of health insurance status.
  - We provide outreach and education at community events, daycares, elementary schools, and high schools to inform children (and parents) of the importance of oral hygiene and nutrition.
  - We have gone into local businesses to provide free oral health assessments.
  - In FY2023 BVHC, with the help of Delta Dental and Stewart's Shops, distributed 3,364 toothbrushes into the community.

- Bennington County Chronic Condition Stats:

- Diabetes prevalence all ages<sup>7</sup>: 7.1%
- Obesity prevalence in adults<sup>8</sup>: 25.4%
- Adults reporting high BP diagnosis<sup>9</sup>: 30%
- Current smokers<sup>10</sup>: 18.1%

- What are we doing?

- BVHC's Population Health Manager provides chronic care management to those with diabetes, hypertension, and other conditions as needed. She is a tobacco cessation counselor and a certified health coach. She hosts a walking group weekly to promote movement, control of chronic conditions, and overall physical and mental health.
- BVHC's Registered Dietitian & Diabetic Educator (placed at BVHC through the Blueprint for Health Program) provides patients with nutrition counseling at no cost.
- Our Registered Dietitian and Population Health Manager cohost free cooking classes, preparing heart healthy, diabetic friendly meals.
- BVHC's Loner Blood Pressure Machine Program allows patients to take machines home to track their blood pressure, assisting providers in diagnosing and managing hypertension.



**8.2% of households in Bennington County have no car;  
24.3% have only one car<sup>11</sup>.**

- What are we doing?
  - BVHC has partnered with the Green Mountain Express (the regional Medicaid Contracted Agency) to provide free transportation to and from visits at BVHC.
  - We are also located on the Green Mountain Express bus line for those without personal transportation who do have the means to pay for their transportation.

# AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION IS WORTH A POUND OF CURE

~BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

- BVHC supplements the Arlington School District's health curriculum, with providers going into the schools to lead discussions on: mental health, sexual health, healthy relationships, consent, nutrition, overall health, addiction, and oral health.
- In FY2023, BVHC staff gave 27 health presentations in schools and daycares.

# THE PROVIDER SHORTAGE

- BVHC is a rural rotation site for the University of New England, College of Dental Medicine. Of the 15 externs we have hosted, 5 have taken positions in Vermont!
- We partner with several colleges to host nurse practitioner students, psychotherapy interns, nursing students, and administrative interns.
- Build your own:
  - We train our own clinical assistants and phlebotomists as well as many of the administrative positions within the health center including billers, front desk receptionists, and human resources staff.

# FEDERALLY QUALIFIED HEALTH CENTERS

EACH ONE IS DIFFERENT BECAUSE OUR  
SERVICES ARE RESPONSIVE TO OUR  
COMMUNITY'S NEEDS

# STATE OF THE HEALTH CENTER

- In order to continue providing the care that Vermonters deserve, in response to the needs of our communities, FQHCs need to see reimbursement better aligned with their individual costs as outlined in federal regulations<sup>14</sup>.
- The cost to provide care is growing much faster than reimbursement.
- BVHC is projecting a loss for FY2024. While we have had federal grants to insulate these losses over the past three years, those funds have expired, and we find ourselves at a critical point.
- Without a change, 1 in 3 Vermonters, 6,814 of whom are from Bennington County<sup>13</sup>, are at risk of losing access to primary care, mental health, and dental services.

# SOURCES

- 1 - American Community Survey, 2022
- 2 - BVHC UDS, 2022
- 3 – American Community Survey, 2022
- 4 – County Health Rankings Vermont Data, 2023
- 5 - AFSP Suicide Statistics, 2021
- 6 - CDC US Drug Overdose Deaths, 2021
- 7 – CDC National Diabetes Statistics Report, 2021
- 8 – Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Prevalence and Trends Data, 2022
- 9 – Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System VT, 2021
- 10 – National Cancer Institute, Vermont Profile, 2020
- 11 – American Community Survey, 2022
- 12 – Bi-State Primary Care Association, 2023
- 13 – UDS Mapper, 2023
- 14 – Benefits Improvement and Protection Act of 2000