


## MEMORANDUM

TO: Representative Lori Houghton, Chair, House Committee on Health Care

FROM: Mark A. Levine MD, Commissioner of Health 

DATE: February 9, 2024

SUBJECT: Follow-up information requested – Fiscal Year 2025 Executive Budget

Below is the information requested during my testimony on February 7, 2024, regarding the Health Department's fiscal year 2025 executive budget proposal.

1. *Regarding the proposed one-time FY25 Opioid Abatement Special Fund appropriation of \$1,428,962 for the expansion of student assistance professionals and school-based substance use prevention services, how will the funds be allocated to schools?*

There are currently 21 school-based substance use prevention grants to supervisory unions and school districts in Vermont. This funding will allow expansion to 31 grants. Funding for those additional 10 grants will be targeted to gap areas identified in the attached map. This specifically includes Caledonia, Orleans, Essex, Addison, Rutland, Orange, and parts of Washington counties. The process will include outreach/meetings with schools in the gap areas, review of data in the region, and technical assistance to Supervisory Unions/School Districts as needed from Vermont Department of Health (VDH), Division of Substance Use Programs (DSU) Prevention Consultants and substance misuse coalitions to prepare for and support this work.

The funds will be issued to schools via a DSU grant directly to the supervisory union/school district and each school will receive largely the same amount to support a Student Assistance Professional (SAP) and provide other supports (screening and referral to substance misuse and mental health services, evidence-based curricula, peer/youth leadership activities, teacher and staff training, and parent and family engagement).



2. *Provide information about the Vermont Household Health Insurance Survey (HHIS).*

The Vermont Household Health Insurance Survey (HHIS) was last conducted in 2021 and was updated to include questions to examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, gather additional information on health savings and health reimbursement accounts, and obtain detailed information about disproportionately affected populations and the financial impact of health care. The [Survey Report](#) was published in March 2022. The survey found that 97% of Vermonters are covered by health insurance, a rate largely unchanged from the 2018 survey.

The Health Department has no funding in its base budget for fielding this survey. The 2018 survey was funded through a one-time general fund appropriation; the 2021 survey was funded with fiscal year 2021 year-end surplus funds carried forward for that purpose. The cost of the 2021 survey was \$387,888.

The Health Commissioner is required by [18 V.S.A. § 9410\(i\)](#) to submit a recommendation every three years to the General Assembly for conducting a survey of the health insurance status of Vermont residents. The Health Department has conducted surveys in 2018 and 2021 and has found limited interest in the results. We have received fewer than 10 information requests about the survey published in 2022, all related to insurance status. Insurance status is also captured by the Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS). The Vermont insurance status data in the ACS are similar to those in the HHIS and could be used to answer these information requests. Considering the limited demand for the overall survey results and the availability of insurance status data from another source, it is my recommendation that the Vermont Household Health Insurance Survey not be conducted in 2024.

3. *What educational materials does the Health Department have available on the safe storage of firearms?*

The Health Department's webpage on firearm safety and safe storage of firearms can be found [here](#).

