

S. 14, Expanding the Vermont Practitioner Recovery Network

Fact Sheet

What does S. 14 do?

S.14 would allow the Vermont Practitioner Health Program (referred to in statute as the Vermont Practitioner Recovery Network) to offer its evaluation, monitoring and support services to any Board of Medical Practice licensee experiencing an impaired ability to practice medicine with reasonable skill or safety.

What is the Vermont Practitioner Health Program?

- The Vermont Practitioner Health Program (VPH) is a program run by the Vermont Medical Society under contract from the Vermont Board of Medical Practice.
- It currently evaluates professionals and oversees treatment programs for health care professionals who are impaired or at risk for impairment by the excessive use of drugs, including alcohol. (VPH does not provide individual treatment services directly, but rather monitors the participant's recovery and compliance with a developed plan).
- Professionals licensed by the Board of Medical Practice are eligible for the program: physicians (M.D.s), podiatrists, physician assistants, radiologist assistants and anesthesiologist assistants.
- Referrals come from the Vermont Board of Medical Practice as well as colleagues, family members, friends, patients and also self-referrals.

Why is this bill needed?

- Because it funded via licensing fees collected by the Board of Medical Practice, VPH is defined under state statute. Current statute limits VPH to using licensing fees to serve to health care professionals who are “chemically dependent.”
- S.14 would allow the VPH program to expand to address a broader range of concerns, including depression, anxiety, disruptive behavior and cognitive decline due to aging. These are areas of need identified by the Vermont Medical Society, VPH and the Board of Medical Practice.
- Access to mental health services and supports is a critical issue for medical practitioners: Suicide among male physicians is 1.41 times higher than for the general population and 2.27 times higher among female physicians; nearly 1/3 of medical interns and residents experience depressive symptoms or depression at some point during their training; more than half of US physician experience at least one symptom of burnout.
- Out of 47 state practitioner health programs, Vermont is one of only four states with a program that focuses exclusively on substance use disorder.
- The Vermont Medical Society, Physician Assistant Academy of Vermont, Vermont Podiatric Medical Association and Vermont Board of Medical Practice all support the bill.

How would this expansion be funded?

In the short term, VPH and the Board of Medical Practice anticipate being able to fund the expanded services with existing resources. In the long term, VMS and the Board of Medical Practice, with the support of the licensed professions, may seek an increase in the license assessment to cover increased expenses – from \$25 per biannual license period to \$50 per license period (for physicians and podiatrists) and from \$10 to \$20 every two years (for AAs, RAs and PAs).

Learn more about the VPH Program here: <http://www.vtmd.org/education/practitioner-health>