

UNIVERSAL, PUBLICLY-FUNDED PRIMARY CARE
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for the
Vermont Psychiatric Association

Bills S.53 and H.248 would establish universal, publicly-funded primary care, including mental health and substance abuse treatment. There are good reasons to support this important legislation:

1. Primary care is where most health care takes place. It is inexpensive and *pays off* enormously in public health, prevention, early treatment of illness, and reduction in suffering.
2. Investing in primary care is the only thing that has been shown to both *improve health and reduce health care costs*. Rhode Island mandated an increase in primary care spending from 5.4% to 8% of health care costs from 2007 to 2011; overall health care costs dropped 18%. We would save millions of dollars and get a huge return on investment if we did the same in Vermont. *Other costs and tax burdens would drop under UPC*: school, town and state employees' medical costs; Medicaid; corrections and other human services.
3. Publicly-financed universal primary care is the only way to focus resources on *prevention*.
4. *Treating mental disorders and substance abuse also saves money and human suffering*. Untreated, they take an enormous toll on society.
5. Universal primary care for all Vermonters would be independent of employment, other insurance, or income. Commercial insurance companies would not be paying for primary care. Therefore, their premiums would go down.
6. To avoid becoming another burdensome insurance, UPC must *provide extremely broad coverage of everything normally done in the office and community by primary care, mental health and substance abuse clinicians*. Exceptions must be extremely rare, or administrative efficiency is lost. UPC must replace as many insurance plans as possible, so the need to bill other plans is minimized. For example, we will have to bill Medicare if it cannot be included in UPC.
7. The primary care and psychiatry *private practice workforces are collapsing* in Vermont, largely due to low reimbursement and massive administrative burdens. (Patients have been desperate for psychiatric care for years.) More clinicians would want to practice here if they were paid fairly and spared administrative hassles. (In 2011, several hundred doctors and medical students said they would want to come to Vermont if we had single payer.) If done right, UPC could *strengthen our clinician workforce*.
8. UPC is an *important step* toward the goal of efficient, effective single payer health care financing that Vermont passed in 2011.

Please move universal primary care forward. Feel free to contact me if you have questions. Thank you for your consideration.

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