



**VPQHC Statewide Telehealth Workgroup – Overview**  
**Joint Committees presentation**

**Senate Health & Welfare/ House Health Care Committee**  
**Tuesday, May 5, 2020**

**Via YouTube Livestream**

**INTRODUCTION/OVERVIEW/BACKGROUND**

Vermont’s Statewide Telehealth Workgroup was initiated under VPQHC’s current 9416 billback contract, FY 2019-2020. The Statewide Telehealth Workgroup is continuing under the upcoming two-year contract currently in the process of being executed with the Vermont Department of Health for FY 2021-2022.

The project started out with the intent of providing support and educational opportunities for providers across the state and continuum of care, to enhance utilization of telehealth technologies as an option for care delivery. The workgroup was in the process of developing and approving a comprehensive charter document to execute an aggressive and finely tuned workplan. Topics of focus for provider education included:

- i. Learning technology implementation
- ii. Mastering patient engagement through a screen
- iii. Understanding billing and reimbursement to optimize revenue
- iv. Evaluating barriers to adoption and uptake
- v. Measuring quality outcomes and identifying opportunities for improvement, including patient satisfaction

During the month of March, gasoline was poured over this project which ignited a rapid-cycle response and VPQHC was “off to the races” to deliver educational information both effectively and rapidly to accommodate social distancing mandates.

Of significant value to the State of Vermont is that **this structure was already established, in place and operational** at the start of the pandemic to accommodate such a rapid deployment of additional resources and educational programs. This structure is inclusive of the entire continuum of services, incorporating primary care, mental health, specialty care, and dental care.

**CURRENT COVID STATE RESPONSE**

VPQHC leveraged the Statewide Telehealth Workgroup structure to collaborate with key partners to disseminate available information through a series of webinars and twice-weekly “Office Hours” using Zoom platform. These informational sessions were developed in response

to front-line needs and requests from valued partners such as Bi-State Primary Care Association, The Vermont Medical Society (VMS), The Vermont Association of Hospitals and Health Systems (VAHHS), The Department of Public Service (DPS) and many others.

VPQHC is continuing to review and update the initial workgroup charter and workplan for the Statewide Telehealth Workgroup to expand the executive leadership structure and implement additional sub-workgroups to address unique features as presented throughout this COVID crisis.

Two webpages have been added to the VPQHC website: A [Vermont Telehealth Resources & Workgroup page](#), and a [Vermont Telehealth Events](#) page. These pages include an inventory of payer policies, implementation resources, extensive curriculums, recordings of past webinars, FAQ documents, PDFs of presentations, information about upcoming telehealth events and the weekly office hours, and other resources.

The following are a few data points that summarize our activities, and their impact, under our COVID-19 response related to telehealth:

- VPQHC has hosted two webinars related to telehealth:
  - o Vermont Telehealth Town Hall (156 participants)
  - o Telehealth Q&A: A Discussion with Commercial Payers (102 participants; 97% attendees satisfied/very satisfied with the event)
  - o Some feedback we have received:
    - Thank you for this! It helped alleviate some fears and confusion.
    - Thank you so much! Glad I was able to attend.
    - Thank you for this webinar. Very informative.
- In partnership with the Northeast Telehealth Resource Center, Bi-State Primary Care Association, and Alpine Telehealth, VPQHC has held twice-weekly telehealth open office hours. To date, we have held a total of seven office hours, and have had 159 people participate. The purpose of these offices hours has been to help providers successfully implement telehealth under COVID-19. Open office hours themes have included: Medicare billing and reimbursement, Federal telehealth funding opportunities, teledentistry, and a conversation with Dr. Norm Ward, CMO, OneCare Vermont, on telehealth and OneCare Vermont & telehealth in a post-COVID-19 world.
- VPQHC has added a telehealth resources, and telehealth events, webpages to its website. Combined, our two telehealth webpages have had over 1,000 “clicks” during this time period, and our overall website visits increased by 86% over the previous month.

### **FUTURE STATE – ONGOING RESPONSE AND NEXT STEPS**

The Statewide Telehealth Workgroup is expanding its structure to accommodate additional specific areas of focus through sub-workgroups and empower an Executive Leadership Council with the authority to address barriers and obstacles to workplan implementation efforts. The expanded structure will include several new aspects to support the expanded functions of the Statewide Telehealth Workgroup. These include:

- i. Broad-based Executive Steering Council
- ii. Additional topic-area specific sub-workgroups to support the comprehensive workplan:
  1. Technical Assistance/Education
  2. Reimbursement and Policy
  3. Technical
  4. Data
  5. Quality Measurement
  6. Access – Broadband/Equipment

As the Statewide Telehealth Workgroup prepares to execute its expanded structure and function, a “list of needs” emerges to support expanded efforts and ongoing transition activities:

- Conduct a comprehensive, statewide evaluation, gap analysis and list of recommendations to inform a broad-based, effective implementation plan.
- Funding to support “subject matter experts” to provide up-to-the-minute reimbursement policy and coding changes that impact revenues.
- Purchasing capacity to ensure access via internet connectivity as an equity issue throughout Vermont; this includes broadband access at the local, personal level
  - Pilot project to deliver “Connectivity Care Packages” for Vermont addresses with clinical and mental health care needs without current service
  - District level efforts to enhance connectivity stability and access to un-served residences
  - Broadband infrastructure support funding for deployment of additional equipment
- Revitalization of the Statewide Telehealth Strategic Plan initially developed under the SIM funding work along with ownership responsibility for continuously updating the Statewide Telehealth Strategic Plan.
- Additional staff resources to support facilitation of the expanded structure and function of the Statewide Telehealth Workgroup.

VPQHC will seek to partner with legislative leadership to connect to funding opportunities currently available to the State of Vermont to implement this comprehensive workplan. Funding will be directed to “boots on the ground” initiatives that will support safe, effective, efficient, timely and patient-centered delivery of care from a system-wide perspective across the continuum of care delivery.



## **CONCLUSIONS**

VPQHC is well-positioned as the statewide quality assurance organization to coordinate, lead and implement rapid cycle improvement initiatives. We have an extensive legacy of collaborative project work that has “moved the ball down the field” and across the goal line. We currently have many affiliated partners that we work with and through to deliver a systems-level approach to improvement. We continuously meet the challenge to disseminate best practice that deliver highest quality outcomes for Vermonters. VPQHC routinely delivers data-driven evaluation to identify opportunities for improvement with comprehensive corrective action plans to address identified needs. Our measurement, alignment and validation expertise is brought to bear when identifying value statements for improvement initiatives and establishing appropriate outcome metrics. As a neutral convener, VPQHC leads fully integrated, highly-functioning learning health systems to deliver improved capability and reliability across the continuum of care.

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on the current state and future aspirations of Vermont’s Statewide Telehealth Workgroup. As always, VPQHC remains a resource to both the Senate Health and Welfare Committee and the House Health Care Committee.