



# Vermont Association of Hospitals and Health Systems

## VAHHS Biennium Advocacy Agenda: 2019-2020

### Maintaining Access to Vermont’s Top-Rated Health Care System

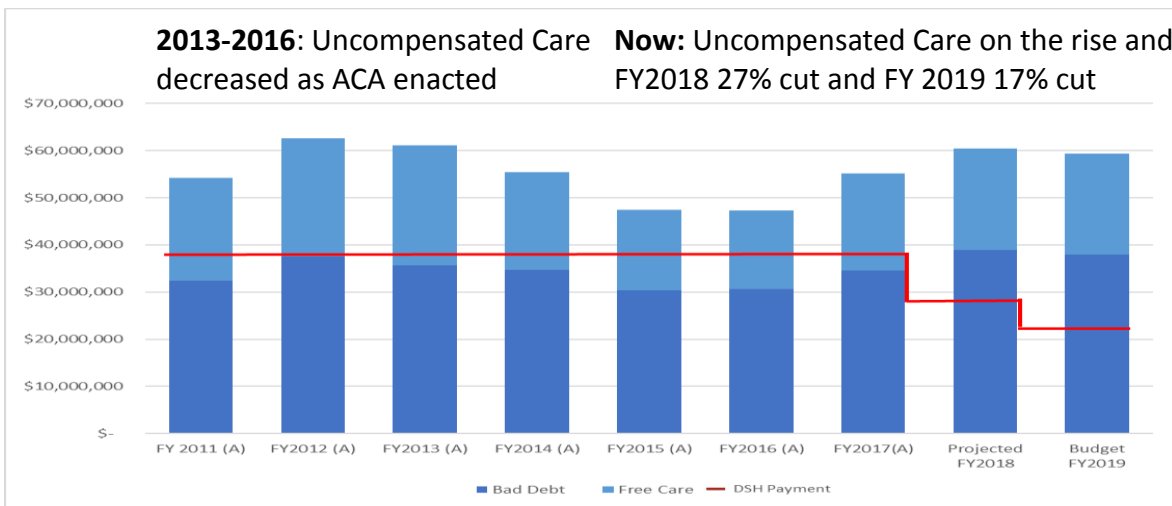
**Workforce Development: Tax Credits and Telemedicine.** VAHHS supports all workforce development efforts in the health care profession and more broadly. A vibrant economy will attract medical professionals and their partners. Understanding the difficulties of the budgeting process, we propose creative solutions like increasing opportunities for telemedicine use and tax credits for primary care professionals, similar to [Maine’s program](#).

Clinical care standards should remain in the hands of the provider and the patient. Legislating clinical care standards can create inefficiencies and exacerbate the workforce shortage while reducing quality.

**Support health care coverage for Vermonters.** With continued threats to the ACA and the effective repeal of the mandate in 2017, hospitals are seeing uncompensated care increase. VAHHS supports a state requirement to maintain health care coverage and other initiatives that will ensure coverage.

**Preserve Disproportionate Share Hospital (DSH) payments to help ensure access to health care services for all Vermonters.** When patients are unable or unwilling to pay their hospital bills, the hospitals cover the cost. Part of this cost is reimbursed through Medicaid funds called Disproportionate Share Hospital (DSH) payments. For the 2018 budget, DSH payments were cut by \$10 million. Last year, hospitals were cut an additional \$4.7 million despite a significant increase in uncompensated care. With ongoing threats to the ACA, hospitals cannot afford further erosion of DSH support.

*DSH Payments vs. Uncompensated Care FY 2011-Budget 2019*



[Affordable prescription drugs for Vermonters through an unused prescription drug repository.](#) In 2018, the legislature passed [Act 114](#) charging the Agency of Human Services to work with stakeholders on the feasibility of a program that would take unused prescription drugs (excluding controlled substances), put them through a quality control process, and offer them to low-income Vermonters at low or no cost. VAHHS supports this initiative and hopes to see the state participate in a program.

## Focus on Improving Mental Health Care

[Data collection and community provider partnerships.](#) VAHHS collected mental health data from psychiatric inpatient units between September 2017 through April 2018. We found that 3% of admissions made up 40% of total inpatient days. This means 92 admissions took up over 19,000 inpatient days. VAHHS will be working with hospitals, community providers, and other stakeholders to determine how to better meet the needs of this small group.

[Provide greater options for Vermonters with mental health needs through secure residential expansion.](#) Hospitals are stepping up to expand psychiatric inpatient capacity; however, investments are needed at all levels in the mental health system. Rutland Regional Medical Center (RRMC), in partnership with Rutland Mental Health Services could build and staff a secure recovery residence in two years through a partnership with the state.

## Leading in Health Care Reform

[Federal funding for health care reform efforts.](#) In 2016, Vermont signed an agreement with the federal government—called the All-Payer Model—to move from paying for health care services to paying for health care outcomes. This requires a substantial cultural shift in which hospitals focus on prevention of disease and injury in addition to treatment. The federal government recognized the enormity of this transformation by allotting up to \$209 million in state and federal dollars over five years to assist participating hospitals. Last year, only \$2.6 million was budgeted for this effort. Right now, hospitals are investing their own resources to make these changes and want to explore ways to obtain federal matching funds to support Vermont’s bold transformation of its health care delivery system.

[Focused Green Mountain Care Board.](#) The Green Mountain Care Board is the only regulatory board of its kind in the nation. It oversees hospitals and health insurers to help improve health care quality and moderate costs for Vermonters. We advocate for a focused Green Mountain Care Board that advances reform goals and accounts for hospital financial health and investments.

## Improving the Health of Vermonters

[Tobacco 21.](#) VAHHS supports raising the age limit for purchasing tobacco products. The increased use of e-cigarettes among young people is extremely concerning. Avoiding unhealthy addictions before they start is a key component to better health outcomes.

[Obesity Bill.](#) VAHHS supports efforts to combat obesity, especially childhood obesity. This bill focuses on promoting healthy food choices and exercise. Reducing childhood obesity now will ensure fewer chronic conditions in the future.