

Kim Anderson
Director of Development and Communications
Community Health Centers of Burlington
Testimony for Senate Health and Welfare
January 28th, 2020

Hello, my name is Kim Anderson and I am the Director of Development and Communications for the Community Health Centers of Burlington, the sole FQHC serving Chittenden County and southern Grand Isle County. I'd like to thank the committee members for being here today to hear more about the importance of FQHCs and the unique services we provide. CHCB has been around since 1971, understanding and addressing the needs of our community members regardless of financial status or life circumstance. We currently care for 30,000 patients, providing medical, dental, counseling and psychiatry services – among many other specialized safety net programs.

I'd like to first touch on the role we have played in combatting the local opioid crisis with our Medication Assisted Treatment program, MAT. For anyone not already familiar with the name Dr. John Brooklyn, he has been a CHCB provider for over 25 years and is by no small coincidence a leader in treating opioid use disorder. He was involved with the formation of the hub-and-spoke model of recovery care, and continues to be an advocate of addressing substance use disorders as you would any other chronic illness. This empowers patients by reducing stigma – and reducing stigmas in health care has been a critical part of CHCB's mission since day one.

As the largest spoke in Chittenden County, CHCB's MAT Program now serves almost 600 patients out of almost 1,000 seeking treatment locally within the primary care setting. Our Medical Director, Dr. Heather Stein, has increased the number of waived providers to 25, meaning over 50% of our medical providers can now provide Suboxone therapy to our patients. Through collaborations with community partners such as the Chittenden County Opioid Alliance, we are seeing results, and these results have served to publicly reinforce something we at CHCB have already known – addiction doesn't discriminate. Open access for treatment programs has allowed us to focus more on preventive efforts, including screening questions at new patient visits to evaluate the need for counseling, the availability of on-demand support services, and integrated mental health services to address substance use struggles beyond opiates.

Our array of integrated services and collaborations with community partners certainly isn't limited to substance use – as the only federally-granted Homeless Healthcare Program in the entire state, CHCB serves approximately 1,500 individuals experiencing homelessness each year and I'm especially proud of our ongoing efforts to work with and support this population. A lot of folks don't realize we offer care coordination and case management services, but it's an essential part of our integrated care. These positions are hugely important within our low-barrier homeless program, and we take great pride in meeting these patients where they're at to again reduce stigma and establish trust in bringing them into our care.

Before I wrap up, I'd like to share one of the most impactful stories over my last decade with CHCB. It concerns a man, Timmy, who was living in a tent at the bottom of a steep hill in Burlington's Old North End. He suffered from debilitating pain as a result of a childhood injury, coupled with trauma and substance use disorder. One of our CHCB case workers, Stephanie, visited Timmy every week for four years, sometimes using snowshoes to get to his encampment on the super snowy days. After four years of building a relationship and trust, she was able to move him into an apartment, sign him up for disability, assign a representative payee, encourage ongoing medical appointments, and even teach him the fundamentals of grocery shopping. When I asked Timmy, after his decades of hardship living outside, what he was scared of in life, if anything; he looked me straight in the eyes and said, "Nothing, *except for disappointing Stephanie.*" True health and wellness is incremental and takes time, but the return on investment is immeasurable. It's something we know as an FQHC, but also as human beings. Thank you again for your support of our work.