



STATE OF VERMONT
AGENCY OF HUMAN SERVICES

MEMORANDUM

TO: House Committee on Appropriations, Health Care, and Human Services
Senate Committees on Appropriations, Health and Welfare, and Health Reform
Oversight

FROM: Michael K. Smith, Secretary, Agency of Human Services

DATE: September 30, 2021

SUBJECT: Appropriation to Expand High-Quality Mental Health and Substance use Disorder
Treatment Professionals

Background

Per Act 74 of the 2021 session, section E.311, *The Agency of Human Services shall distribute the remaining \$1,500,000 appropriated to the Agency to make strategic investments in order to expand the supply of high-quality mental health and substance use disorder treatment professionals (c) Until the funds have been fully expended, the Agency of Human Services shall provide quarterly reports to the House Committees on Appropriations, on Health Care, and on Human Services; the Senate Committees on Appropriations and on Health and Welfare; and the Health Reform Oversight Committee with information on the following: (1) the specific designated and specialized service agencies that have received funds to date and the programs within each of those agencies in which the financial assistance recipients will deliver services;(2) the amount of financial assistance funding provided to each recipient;(3) the specific degrees or certificates toward which the tuition assistance recipients are working and those earned by loan repayment recipients; and(4) the number of new employees attracted to the designated and specialized service agencies as a result of the financial assistance, their fields of study, and the programs in which they deliver services.*

Update

This memo serves as the quarterly report to the Legislature with an update on progress made to distribute the appropriated funds.

Since the end of the 2021 legislative session, the Agency of Human Services Secretary's Office, Department of Health, and Department of Mental Health have been working with Vermont Care Partners on contract language to distribute the \$1.5M in funds to the network of Designated and Specialized Services Agencies (DA/SSAs) in Vermont.

The agreement term will be two years and include the following clauses:

1. Time commitment for continued service upon receiving funding for loan repayment or tuition reimbursement.
2. Payment measures are being incorporated to ensure the data requested by the legislature can be provided.

As well, there has been significant work at Vermont Care Partners to determine a methodology that distributes the funds to each agency based on the number of staff employed; this ensures an equitable distribution will occur.

The contract language is finalized and should be fully executed by late September.

Of additional note, recruitment and retention continue to be a significant issue for the DA/SSAs in Vermont. To ensure all are focused on this issue, a multi-department and provider Workforce Task Force was launched in June. Thus far, four meetings have been held and a strategic plan is being developed that creates strategies and action steps to advance recruitment and retention at the DA/SSAs. Vermont is also taking part in a national learning collaborative and obtaining technical assistance through the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.