

Governor's Budget Commentary 2-8-21

Good evening,

I am a 30 year career healthcare worker and currently the Chief Financial Officer of Northeast Kingdom Human Services, with offices in Newport/Derby and St Johnsbury, and we are members of the Vermont Care Partners network. We serve individuals with mental health needs, substance addiction issues and intellectual developmental needs living in Caledonia, Essex and Orleans counties. Planned, sustainable state support in the form of a rate increase is necessary. Please find a way to support the Designated Agencies and Specialized Service Agencies that provide exceptional care to the most vulnerable.

We contract with the State of Vermont, to support some of the most complex and economically challenged individuals. By mandate, we have a NO refusal Policy, meaning we serve any and all people, to the best of our staffing ability. Best practice guidance has proven that local community care supports individuals the best. Most services are intended to keep people out of the limelight, while helping these clients achieve employment, remain enrolled in their education, and be positive contributors to the local community and economy.

Our current funding does not adequately support the infrastructure and staffing levels needed. The DA/SSA network is often a training ground as people work to obtain licensure, and then find other new and higher paying jobs. The DA/SSA network is 90% to 98% funded by Medicaid. Our agency turnover rate is 25%, our sister agencies report slightly higher rates at 27%. Our current staffing vacancy rate is 8.75% which indicates the challenge of recruiting skilled, licensed, clinically trained individuals needed to staff our organization. Over the past 3 months we have seen six individuals decline positions due to low pay.

Another area that requires support, is crisis beds within the Developmental Services system of care, currently there are only 2 resources state wide, which are often full. It is getting more challenging to find individuals willing to open their homes to become a shared living provider, due to low stipend payments.

Service equity is a challenge. We go to client, this is a distinguishing characteristic of our core service model. We share the concern of others for adequate broadband for our remote workforce and enhancing communication options for clients and our staff.

If the state is able to find one time funds to support infrastructure needs for facility renovations, and sustainable technology for the remote work force, the DA/SSA network would benefit.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Denis Houle
NKHS, CFO