

Overview and  
Tuition Assistance and  
Loan Repayment  
Program



VERMONT  
CARE  
PARTNERS

Testimony on an act relating to  
enhancing workforce and economic  
development opportunities

House Human Services Committee  
March 16, 23

Julie Tessler, Executive Director, VCP





# Today

- Overview Of VCP and Designated And Specialized Services Agencies
- Core Functions and Funding
- VCP Employment Investment Program



# Vermont Care Partners Role

**VCP Mission:** Provide statewide leadership for an integrated, high-quality system of comprehensive services and supports.

Our sixteen non-profit community-based member agencies offer care to Vermonters affected by developmental disabilities, mental health conditions and substance use disorders.

Our person-and family-centered services are coordinated with other community providers to serve Vermonters in their homes, schools, communities, and places of employment.

We believe that Vermonters have a fundamental right to live in healthy and safe communities with access to locally provided health and support services.

Our services address the social contributors of health to advance the State's aims of improving overall health, controlling the cost of health care, and promoting access to quality care.



# STATEWIDE SYSTEM OF CARE IN VERMONT DESIGNATED AND SPECIALIZED SERVICE AGENCIES

**NCSS:** Northwestern  
Counseling & Support  
Services [www.ncssinc.org](http://www.ncssinc.org)

**NKHS:** Northeast Kingdom  
Human Services  
[www.nkhs.org](http://www.nkhs.org)

**GMSS:** Green Mountain  
Support Services  
[www.gmssi.org](http://www.gmssi.org)

**LCMHS** Lamoille County  
Mental Health Services  
[www.lamoille.org](http://www.lamoille.org)

**CCS:** Champlain  
Community Services  
[www.ccs-vt.org](http://www.ccs-vt.org)

**HC:** Howard Center  
[www.howardcenter.org](http://www.howardcenter.org)

**NFI:** Northeastern Family  
Institute, NFI Vermont, Inc.  
[www.nfivermont.org](http://www.nfivermont.org)

**WCMHS:** Washington  
County Mental Health  
Services  
[www.wcmhs.org](http://www.wcmhs.org)

**CSAC:** Counseling Service  
of Addison County  
[www.csac-vt.org](http://www.csac-vt.org)

**CMC:** Clara Martin Center  
[www.claramartin.org](http://www.claramartin.org)

**UVS:** Upper Valley Services  
[www.uvs-vt.org](http://www.uvs-vt.org)

**LSI:** Lincoln Street, Inc.  
[www.lincolnstreetinc.org](http://www.lincolnstreetinc.org)

**RMHS:** Rutland Mental  
Health Services /  
Community Care Network  
[www.rmhsccn.org](http://www.rmhsccn.org)

**HCRS:** Health Care &  
Rehabilitation Services  
[www.hcrs.org](http://www.hcrs.org)

**UCS:** United Counseling  
Service of Bennington  
County  
[www.ucsvt.org](http://www.ucsvt.org)

**FFSV:** Families First in  
Southern Vermont  
[www.familiesfirstvt.org](http://www.familiesfirstvt.org)



# Indispensable Public System

---

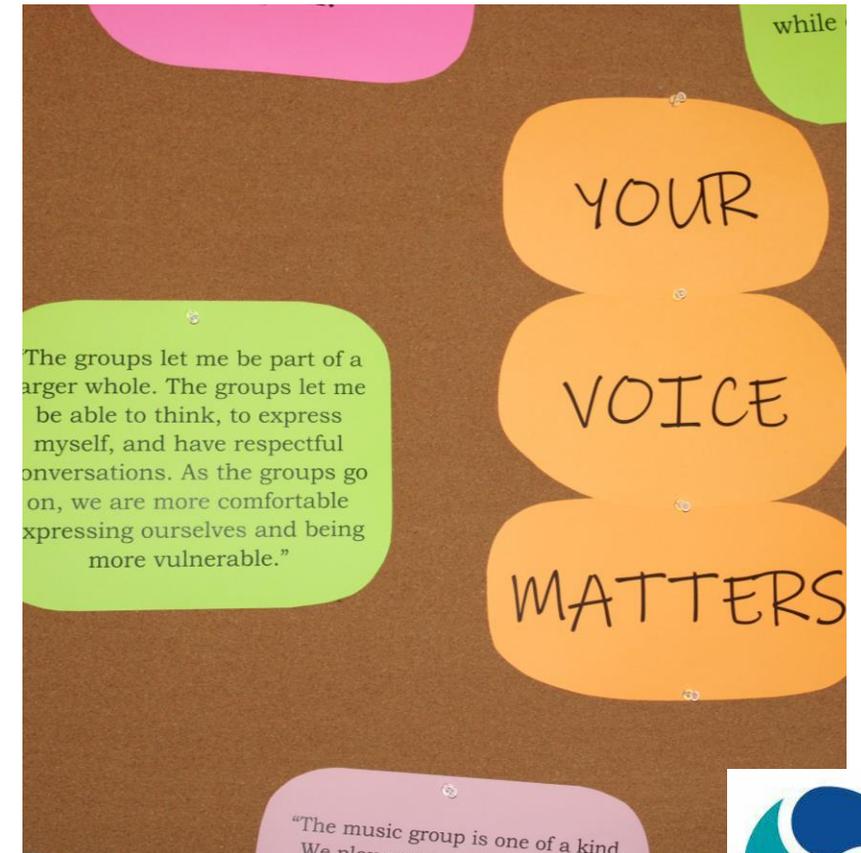
- Designated to meet the needs of specific populations
  - Adults with Serious Mental Illness = CRT
  - Children/Youth with Severe Emotional Disturbance
  - Vermonters with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
  - Preferred Providers of Substance Use Disorder[SUD] Treatment
- Outpatient Mental Health and SUD Services
  - Treatment Safety Net for many Vermonters
  - Typically carries waitlists
  - No refusal
  - Accepts all insurances and no insurance
- 24/7 Crisis Response Services for all Vermonters



# Crisis in the Current System is Directly Related to Inadequate Funding

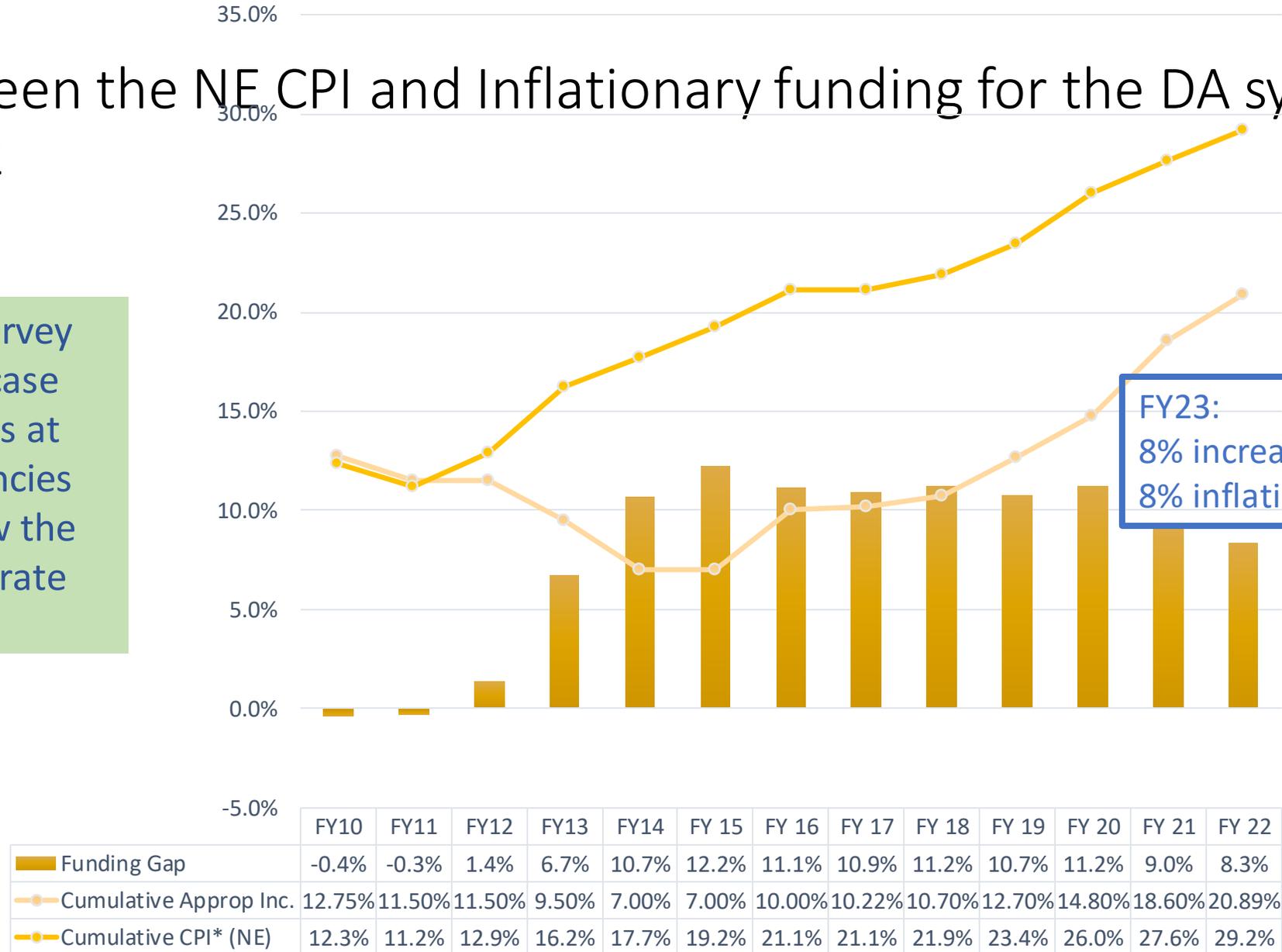
---

- Over 30,000 Vermonters served annually
- Over 6 million service hours
- System-wide budget of approximately \$600 million
- 6,000 FTEs of which over 1,000 are currently vacant
- Unlike any health care, education, and state government, there are no mechanisms for annualized increases/COLA
- Level funded in Governor's FY24 budget request



# Gap between the NE CPI and Inflationary funding for the DA system FY10-FY22

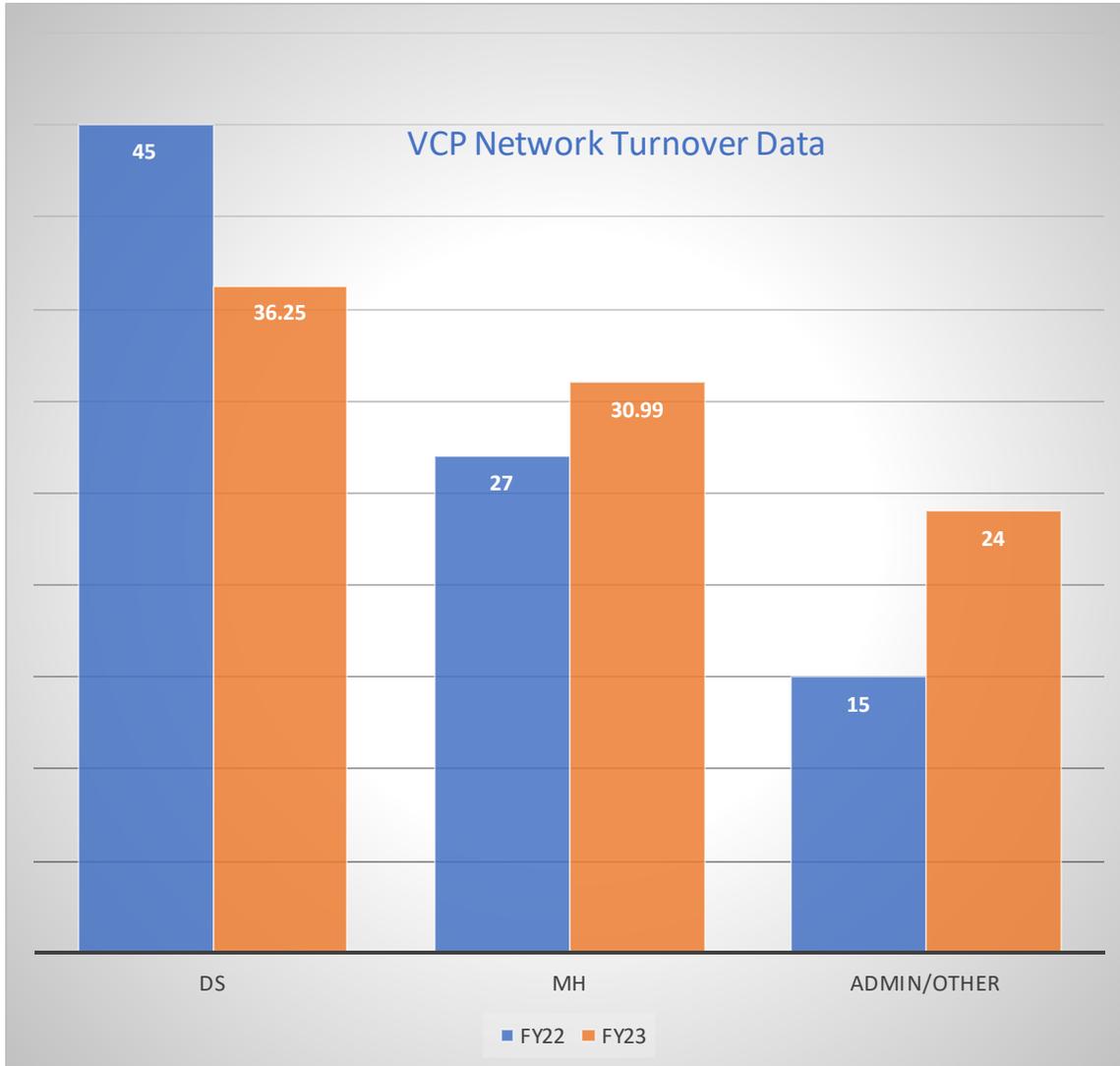
January 2023 survey found BA level case manager salaries at designated agencies are 13.5% below the median market rate



FY23:  
8% increase  
8% inflation



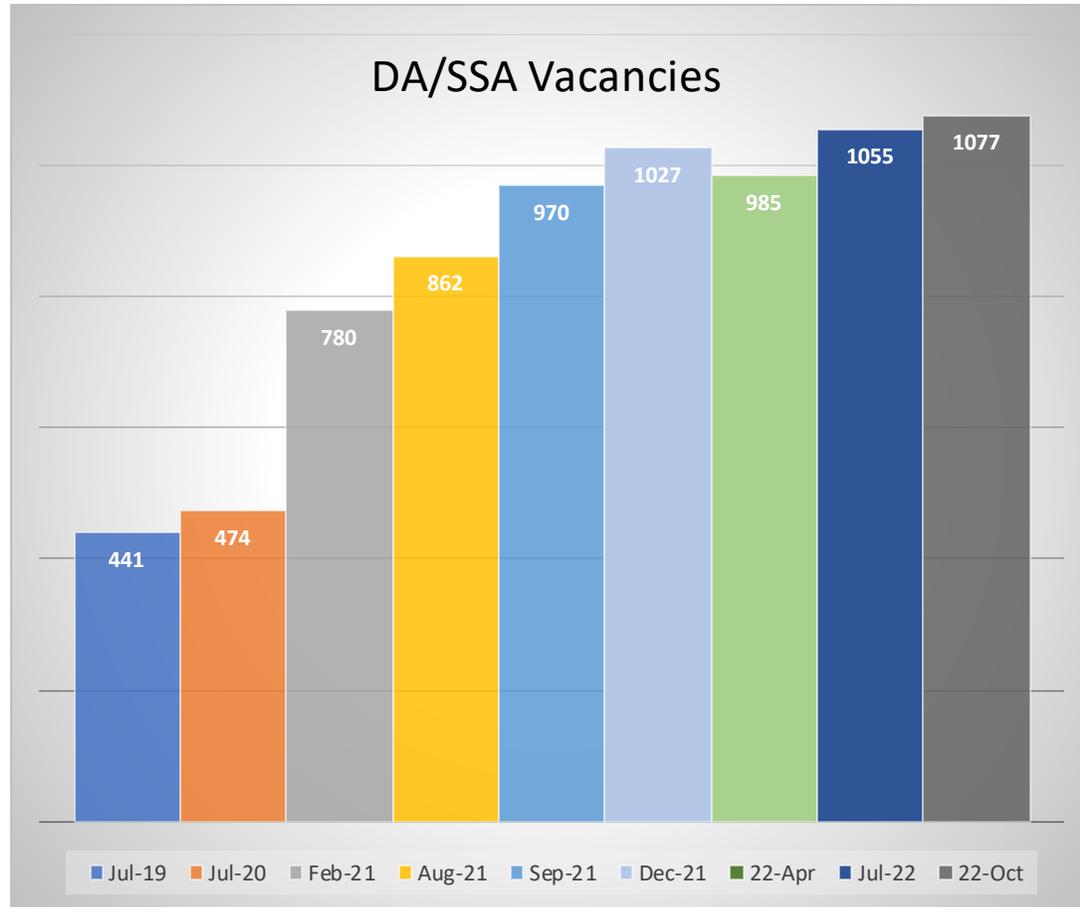
# Workforce data and trends



- Systemwide staff turnover in 2022 was 33.6% statewide. A significant driving factor is low, non-competitive salaries
- Currently the system is reporting over 16% vacancy rate in mental health and substance use disorders and over 20% in developmental services



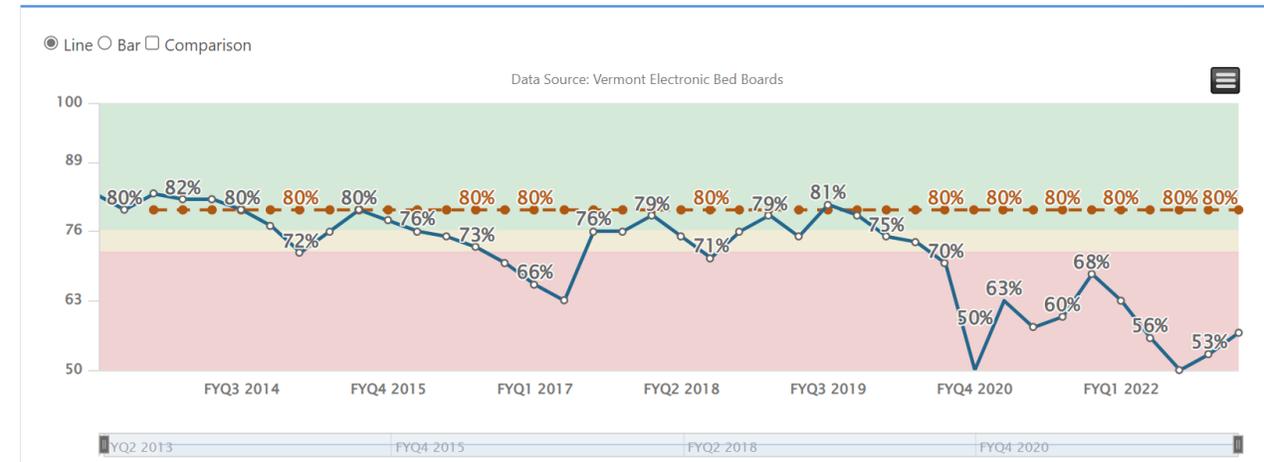
# Staffing shortages = reduced bed capacity



### % occupancy of Designated Agency adult crisis bed programs

57%

FYQ1 2022



# A STATEWIDE SYSTEM OF CARE AT RISK

If the system fails, it will have a profound impact on the safety net that was created to support vulnerable Vermonters and place additional demands on public safety services.

The needs and costs to support vulnerable Vermonters will not go away, they will show up in more costly interventions such as hospital emergency department and inpatient care, criminal justice interventions and higher costs to schools.

Health and safety of vulnerable Vermonters are at risk



# Employee Investment Program

## Program History

- Tobacco Settlement \$1.5 million for Mental Health and Substance Use Staff - implemented 2022
- Act 183 new funds \$1.25 million for Mental Health and Substance Use Staff – AHS will distribute
- Request \$6 new funds for ALL Designated and Specialize Service Agency Staff

## Outcomes

- Over 320 awards made
- 94% Employee Retention Rate systemwide
- Supports Employee Recruitment
- Tuition Assistance supports workforce development



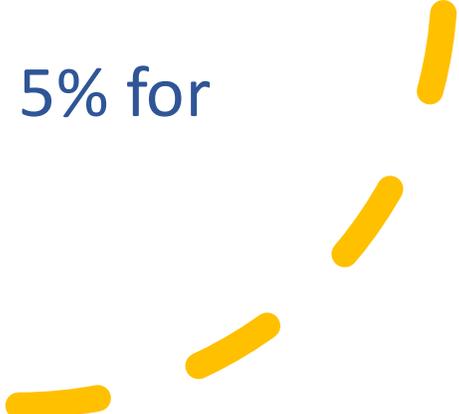
Successful  
Outcomes –  
Just one year  
out

## Clara Martin Center

- 100% retention of staff who took part in the program
- 81% used for Loan Repayment; 19% used for Tuition Assistance
- Tuition assistance supported education to become: Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner; Master level therapists; School Based Behavioral Specialist
- Loan repayment ensured retention of: School Based Classroom Case Managers; Master Level Therapists; Board Certified Behavioral Analyst; Behavioral Interventionists, Substance Use Disorder Therapist; CRT Case Manager; School Based Special Educator; Drug Treatment Court Case Manager; School Based Clinicians
- Turnover has reduced by 17.9% within 6 months after initial program rollout

# Successful Outcomes – just one year out

## Northwestern Counseling & Support Services

- 98.2% retention of staff who took part in the program
  - 10% have reapplied for year two thus far
  - 87% used for Loan Repayment; 13% used for Tuition Assistance
  - Program supported MA and BA degrees 50/50 split
  - 95% used for mental health staff, 5% for nursing staff
- 

# \$6 million program expansion for ALL staff can address challenges

44% of staff  
systemwide are  
currently ineligible  
for the benefit

The exclusion of  
some staff from  
the program  
erodes morale and  
trust

AHEC advises that  
the awards of  
\$3,000 - \$5,000  
are far below best  
practice

Employees of  
FQHCs can access  
awards of \$50,000  
for two years  
employment  
commitment





**13 Baldwin Street, Montpelier, VT 05602**



**(802) 223-1773**



**Julie@vermontcarepartners.org**



**[www.vermontcarepartners.org](http://www.vermontcarepartners.org)**



**VERMONT  
CARE  
PARTNERS**