

**From Alice R. Ely, Executive Director**

**Public Health Council of the Upper Valley, Serving Vermont and New Hampshire Towns**

February 23, 2024

**Testimony in Support of Vermont S.231 – an act relating to establishing a pilot for community nurse programs serving aging Vermonters**

*“...how to help older adults who are experiencing difficulties aging at home to attain a higher level of physical, psychological and social wellbeing.”<sup>1</sup>*

There is no debate that older Vermonters are the fastest growing age group in the state. Many of these Vermonters aged 65 and older want to continue living in their homes, independently, for as long as possible. I believe we should all want this for them. Intergenerational communities are more vibrant and connected. Many of these older people are anchors in our communities, maintaining the histories and traditions that make our communities unique and contributing to leadership and volunteerism. Helping them maintain their physical, psychological, and social wellbeing as they age serves us all well. And quite frankly the costs of neglecting these older Vermonters’ needs are much, much higher.

The Upper Valley of Vermont and New Hampshire has a 10+ year history with community nursing and it is spreading year by year. Here is what I hope you will consider, based on our experience:

1. Community nurses fill a gap in the healthcare system. Many people think visiting nurses are sufficient for in-home care. BUT visiting nurses provide medically ordered care only and will discharge patients based on Medicare guidelines. This means their services are episodic and based only on medical need. Community nurses never discharge a patient.
2. The most commonly reported services provided by our community nurses are emotional support, medication education and management, and addressing safety concerns that can be managed with support.
3. As a result of community nursing services, clients have seen a reduction in anxiety and social isolation. Many have been able to remain safely in their own homes when that outcome was in doubt.
4. Community nursing prevents or slows the progression of risks that lead to more expensive levels of care and take away people’s autonomy.

Please support Vermont S.231 and give more Vermont communities the opportunity to experience community nursing and the many benefits that emerge from it for all of us.

*“The Community Nurse model of in-home support and health care coordination for older adults fills significant gaps in the health care continuum, particularly in rural communities. The fact that the programs are locally embedded enables the nurses to tap into and work with community partners, as well as partners from the traditional health care system, to improve the quality of life for older adults.”<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> [Filling the Gaps: In Support of Aging at Home](#), Sarah Jo Brown, RN (ret), PhD & Laurie Harding, RN, MS, Nov 2021

<sup>2</sup> Ibid