

Health Equity Advisory Commission

Overview and 2024 Recommendations

Overview of the Health Equity Advisory Commission (HEAC)

The HEAC was created by the Vermont General Assembly through Act 33 of 2021 to:

- 1) Promote health equity and eradicate health disparities among Vermonters, including particularly those who are Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color; individuals who are LGBTQ; and individuals with disabilities.
- 2) Amplify the voices of impacted communities regarding decisions made by the State that impact health equity, whether in the provision of health care services or as the result of the social determinants of health.
- 3) Provide strategic guidance on the development of the Office of Health Equity (OHE), including recommendations on the structure, responsibilities, and jurisdiction of such an office.

2023 Activities & Accomplishments

Building a consensus regarding the placement of the Office of Health Equity in the VT Dept. of Health (VDH).

Securing \$250,000 base funding for the Office of Health Equity, contingent upon establishing an administrative home for the OHE.

Securing \$500,000 for community grants, contingent upon establishing and staffing the Office of Health Equity.

Building partnerships with health-related initiatives, including the VT Health Assessment and the State Health Improvement Plan.

2024 Recommendations for Legislative Action

The HEAC recommends that the General Assembly:

- 1) **Create an Office of Health Equity (OHE) in statute**, placing it within the Vermont Department of Health. The legislature should review this decision in three years to ensure that the OHE is situated in a manner that allows it to engage in a whole-of-government approach to health equity.
- 2) **Increases OHE's budget by \$200,000 for FY'25**. By the following year, add \$250,000 to the budget for community grants that further health equity.
- 3) Moves the HEAC from its temporary home in the Agency of Administration to the Agency of Human Services to better align it with the OHE.
- 4) **Appropriate \$200,000 for the HEAC**, separate from the OHE, to support its work assessing and advising the health equity impact of policies and programs across state government.

Powers & Duties under Act 33

- 1) Provide guidance on the development of the Office of Health Equity.
- 2) Provide advice and make recommendations to the Office of Health equity once established.
- 3) Review, monitor, and advise all State agencies regarding the impact of current and emerging State policies, procedures, practices, laws, and rules on the health of the identified populations.
- 4) Identify and examine the limitations and problems associated with existing rules, programs, and services related to the health status of the identified populations.
- 5) Advise the Dept. of Health and the General Assembly on any funding decisions relating to eliminating health disparities and promoting health equity.
- 6) To the extent funds are available, distribute grants that stimulate the development of community-based and neighborhood-based projects that will improve the health outcomes of the identified populations.
- 7) Advise the General Assembly on efforts to improve cultural competency, cultural humility, and antiracism in the health care system through training and continuing education requirements for health care providers and other clinical professionals.

Composition of the HEAC

11 State Government Representatives

18 Community Groups representing Vermonters who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color, Vermonters who are LGBTQ+, and Vermonters with disabilities:

- Racial Justice Alliance
- Rutland area NAACP
- Association for Africans Living in Vermont
- Windham County NAACP
- Pride Center of Vermont
- Outright Vermont
- Migrant Justice
- Out in the Open
- Another Way Community Center
- Vermont Psychiatric Survivors
- Vermont Center for Independent Living
- Elnu Abenaki Tribe
- Nulhegan Abenaki Tribe
- Koasek Traditional Nation of Missiquoi
- Vermont Commission on Native American Affairs
- Green Mountain Self-Advocates
- Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council
- VT Federation of Families for Childrens Mental Health

Contact and Information

Rev. Mark Hughes, Vermont Racial Justice Coalition, Co-Chair HEAC

mark@vtracialjusticealliance.org

Kirsten Murphy, Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council, Co-Chair HEAC

Kirsten.Murphy@Vermont.gov

Reports and Meeting information available at

<https://aoa.vermont.gov/HealthEquityAdvisoryCommission>