

AIDS Services Organizations – FY 2026 Budget Adjustment Request
Submitted by Melissa Farr, Executive Director, Vermont CARES
January 14, 2026

I am testifying on behalf of the 3 AIDS Services Organizations in Vermont – Vermont CARES, AIDS Project of Southern Vermont, and HIV/HCV Resource Center.

The FY 26 HIV/AIDS budget included funding for client-based support services, HIV and harm reduction services, and syringe services.

Given the increasing need in our communities for harm reduction and emergency assistance, without a budget adjustment, we face great challenges in getting through this fiscal year; we will not be able to continue to provide compassionate and consistent support to the Vermonters who rely on us every day.

The cost of doing this work has risen across the board. Staffing, rent, insurance, utilities, transportation, and supply expenses have increased significantly, while funding levels have not kept pace. Our work requires skilled people supported by resources that are sustainable and not consistently at risk. Flat funding does not allow organizations to keep up, let alone build the capacity needed to respond to what is happening in our communities right now, when both those living with HIV and people who use drugs are targeted daily.

For people living with HIV and people who use harm reduction services, our programs are often the first and sometimes only place they feel safe asking for help. Many of the people we serve have faced stigma, judgment, or outright rejection elsewhere.

HIV prevention and care and harm reduction services are effective because they are rooted in real relationships and evidence-based practices. They prevent new infections, reduce overdoses, and connect people to treatment and stability. Our services keep people alive.

We are already seeing the impact of when funding does not keep up – the current closure of the Pride Center of Vermont and The Center for Health and Learning, which focused on statewide suicide prevention and youth mental health, have put a greater strain on our organizations.

We are requesting a \$45,000 budget adjustment increase in Sec. E.312 (2) :

(2) In fiscal year 2026, and as provided by this section, the Department of Health shall provide grants in the amount of ~~\$295,000-\$340,000~~ from the General Fund for HIV and Harm Reduction Services to the following organizations:

- (A) Vermont CARES: ~~\$140,000~~ \$165,000;
- (B) AIDS Project of Southern Vermont: ~~\$100,000~~ \$115,000; and
- (C) HIV/HCV Resource Center: ~~\$55,000~~ \$60,000.

Thank you for your time and for your consideration of our request.