



Date: February 17, 2025
To: Chair Black and members of the House Health Care Committee
From: Tina Zuk, Government Relations Director, American Heart Association
Re: Budget and Policy Recommendations for FY26 Budget

As your committee begins to consider what it will include in your budget memo to House Appropriations, we hope that you will consider the budget requests outlined below. These are modest priorities of the Heart Association that will protect infants and children, save lives, and save health care spending via prevention.

- **CARDIAC EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLANS. \$150,000 to provide a grant program for Vermont schools most in need of resources to help implement cardiac emergency response plans.**

Though more than 200 Vermont schools have AEDs, Vermont's cardiac arrest survival rate is among the lowest in the nation at 7.5%.

This funding will help ensure there are trained lay-responders, especially in rural areas, where EMS response times may be challenged. It could be used for AEDs and CPR training.

These cardiac emergency response plans can more than double survival rates.

Cardiac arrests do happen at Vermont schools – 24 in the last ten years – including at the Milton vs. Barre basketball game on Jan. 3rd at Spaulding where 16 year-old [Milton sophomore Dominic Barcomb was saved](#) due to the cardiac emergency plan, training and quick response of Spaulding's staff and coaches.

This small investment could literally mean the difference between life and death.

- **MEDICAID FOR MORE PREGNANT WOMEN. Increase income eligibility for pregnant women under Dr. Dynasaur to 312%.**

Ensuring pregnant women have comprehensive coverage is critical for the health of both moms and babies. Access to care before, during, and after pregnancy is linked to lower maternal and infant mortality rates and helps reduce health disparities across all racial and ethnic groups.

Medicaid's lower cost-sharing provides better financial protection, making essential health care and treatments more accessible during a time when finances can be tight. This is especially important for pregnant woman who may have CVD or other comorbidities.

- **UNIVERSAL SCHOOL MEALS. Protect funding for Vermont's universal school meals program.**

For students and families, healthy school meals for all: ensures that all students receive two free, healthy meals every school day; reduces the burden on families to complete the eligibility paperwork; helps the family budget; ensures that students whose families may move in and out of eligibility or are in the foster care system always receive healthy meals; and mitigates stigma and lunch shaming. Universal meals make sure that kids can focus on learning. It's working.

- **SUPPORT CHILD CARE. Leave the base funding for early childhood education intact.**

Governor Scott's administration proposed diverting nearly \$20 million from Act 76 reserved childcare funds to other government expenses in their proposed 2026 budget, this before the bill has been properly implemented.

Research shows high-quality birth-to-five programs can lead to better outcomes in education, health, social behaviors, and employment.

Let's do everything we can to ensure Vermont kids get a healthy start. Vermont needs to use every dollar of childcare funding for its intended purpose, solving Vermont's childcare crisis.

- **ONLINE ENFORCEMENT OFFICER. Provide \$160,000 in funding for the creation of an online enforcement officer to prevent illegal online sales of tobacco products in Vermont.**

Through combined efforts of VDH, DLL and the AGO, Vermont has already collected over \$1 million in funds from online retailers who have settled lawsuits for illegally selling tobacco products in Vermont. This position would be dedicated to ensuring these sales do not happen, especially to youth in Vermont. And settlement funds could be dedicated to Vermont's Tobacco Control Program to prevent youth from getting hooked.