



# PEOPLE'S HEALTH & WELLNESS CLINIC

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*Tuesday, February 10, 2026*

Dear Members of the House Health Care Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the People's Health and Wellness Clinic (PHWC), a critical healthcare safety net serving underserved and marginalized populations across Central Vermont.

## Who We Are

Since 1994, PHWC has provided free, high-quality medical, mental health, and oral healthcare to uninsured and underinsured Vermonters. In addition to direct clinical services, PHWC provides case management, referrals, and assistance enrolling patients in insurance and financial assistance programs.

As a federally deemed free clinic, PHWC is **prohibited from billing patients or insurers for services**. We rely almost entirely on grants, municipal support, and private donations to operate.

PHWC currently operates with five staff members totaling 3.5 full-time equivalent positions and more than 30 volunteer physicians, nurses, dentists, and administrative professionals. Our annual operating budget is approximately 460,000 dollars. Despite these limited resources, PHWC remains one of the most efficient healthcare access points in Central Vermont.

## Growing Demand and Capacity Constraints

Demand for PHWC services continues to increase significantly. Between 2022 and 2025, PHWC experienced a 30 percent increase in patients served.

In 2025 alone, PHWC served 668 unduplicated patients, including 223 new patients. The clinic provided 740 medical visits and 457 dental visits, for a total of nearly 1,400 total appointments. Patients traveled from 60 towns across Vermont.

More than half of our patients have health insurance but cannot find a primary care provider or afford out-of-pocket costs. Nearly one-quarter of patients earn less than 14,000 dollars annually, and the vast majority live below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. These are Vermonters who would otherwise delay care, rely on emergency departments, or go without treatment entirely.

## Current Operational Limitations

PHWC currently holds patient clinics Tuesday through Thursday. On Mondays and Fridays, our clinical team must close patient services to manage essential behind-the-scenes work including medication refills, patient follow-up care, care coordination, insurance enrollment assistance, and complex case management.

This schedule reflects staffing limitations, not community need.

At current staffing levels, PHWC provides approximately 24 medical patient visits per

week and 12 dental patient visits per week. Our providers and volunteers are already working at maximum sustainable capacity.

### **Funding Request: Expanding Access Through Strategic Staffing**

PHWC is requesting legislative support to expand staffing capacity in order to increase patient access to care.

Specifically, this funding would allow PHWC to convert existing part-time clinical and case management roles into full-time positions, improving continuity of care and patient throughput, and hire a full-time Office Manager to manage the growing volume of patient intake, insurance navigation, scheduling, and administrative documentation requirements.

These staffing investments are essential infrastructure. Volunteer providers cannot function efficiently without adequate administrative and clinical support.

### **Projected Impact of Funding**

With this staffing expansion, PHWC would immediately increase clinical access by approximately **18 additional medical patient visits per week and 8 additional dental patient visits per week.**

Over the course of a year, this translates to hundreds of additional Vermonters receiving timely primary care, dental treatment, wound care, chronic disease management, and preventive services.

### **System-Wide Cost Avoidance**

Free clinics like PHWC play a critical role in reducing avoidable healthcare system costs by preventing emergency department utilization for non-emergent conditions, treating dental infections before they become life-threatening or require hospital intervention, providing wound

care that prevents hospital admissions, and stabilizing chronic disease before it becomes catastrophic and expensive to treat.

PHWC provides this care at a fraction of the cost of traditional healthcare delivery settings.

### **The Urgency of This Investment**

PHWC has reached a critical operational threshold. Demand continues to rise, patient complexity is increasing, and staff are stretched maintaining both direct care and administrative requirements.

Without staffing expansion, PHWC will be forced to maintain capped patient capacity while the need in our communities continues to grow.

With strategic investment, PHWC can expand access quickly, efficiently, and measurably.

### **Closing**

PHWC remains deeply committed to closing healthcare access gaps in Vermont's healthcare system. Free and charitable clinics play a unique and essential role in reaching populations that often fall through traditional healthcare structures.

This funding request represents a targeted, high-impact investment that will expand healthcare access, reduce system costs, and improve health outcomes for some of Vermont's most vulnerable residents.

Thank you for your continued partnership and commitment to ensuring that every Vermonter has access to care when they need it.

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