

February 17, 2026

Rep. Alyssa Black, Chair
Rep. Francis McFaun, Vice Chair
Rep. Daisy Berbeco, Ranking Member
Rep. Brian Cina
Rep. Wendy Critchlow
Rep. Allen "Penny" Demar

Rep. Leslie Goldman
Rep. Lori Houghton
Rep. Karen Lueders
Rep. Debra Powers
Rep. Valorie Taylor

Sent via e-mail

Dear Members of the House Committee on Health Care:

The undersigned represent the spectrum of health care services in Vermont, including primary care practitioners, independent practitioners, long term care facilities, and hospitals.

We are writing to urge the Committee to **restore state health care dollars to support the Vermont Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) Network's work in primary care pipeline development and recruitment and retention efforts**. Without this funding, which includes early health career exploration, loan repayment support to attract and retain providers, and continuing education opportunities, Vermont's entire health care network would suffer the loss of the formative work that AHEC provides.

Please include the following items in the House Health Care Committee Budget Recommendations:

- Remove the statutory sunset date of 6/30/2027 for the VT AHEC Scholars Medical Student Incentive Scholarship/Loan Forgiveness Program
- Re-instate AHEC funding eliminated in the proposed FY27 budget via three longitudinal VDH grants
 - \$500,000 AHEC Support Grant supporting infrastructure and early pipeline health careers programming across Vermont
 - \$667,111 Vermont Educational Loan Repayment (ELR) Program for Health Care Professionals, state-based loan repayment program for primary care physicians (MD, DO), APRNs, certified nurse midwives, PAs, nurses, dentists, and NDs
 - \$50,000 MD Placement Grant for Physician Placement services

The Vermont AHEC Network has been a champion for primary care, offering statewide workforce development programs since 1997. They focus on providing innovative programs that support the health careers infrastructure needed **to maintain high quality health care access for all Vermonters including those in our most rural and underserved communities**.

AHEC has been an active and integrated part of the Vermont health care landscape working collaboratively with practices, hospitals, and community partners across the state. The Program Office at UVM along with the Northern and Southern Vermont AHEC Centers provide **individualized programming at the county level that leads to personalized offerings that meet the individual health care needs of each community**. Further, they currently serve advisory roles on the Vermont Health Care Workforce Strategic Plan Advisory Group and the Vermont Steering Committee for Comprehensive Primary Health Care demonstrating their commitment to collaboratively supporting primary care with other Vermont stakeholders.

AHEC has active grants with the Vermont Department of Health that are currently at risk through the Governor's FY27 proposed budget cuts. Further, while AHEC is well suited to innovate, collaborate, and implement some of the activity goals of the Rural Health Transformation Program, **RHTP funds cannot be allocated to supplant current programs or fund loan repayment programs**. With this in mind, it becomes imperative that the Vermont Legislature continue to invest in primary care through a multifaceted approach that includes primary care health care delivery reform as well as primary care workforce development and professional support.

The reach and impact of these awards across Vermont is substantial. Included with this letter are two infographics that highlight the value of these awards and what AHEC is able to achieve in the area of early pipeline development as well as physician recruitment and retention.

The Vermont AHEC Network is a valued member of Vermont's primary care community. They provide the health careers pipeline development, recruitment services, loan repayment options, and primary care professional support that builds and strengthens our primary care workforce network. Investing in Vermont AHEC Network illustrates Vermont's commitment to improving healthcare for all by increasing access, decreasing cost, improving outcomes and providing the right care, at the right time, in the right place.

Thank you for your consideration,

Jessa Barnard
Executive Director, Vermont Medical Society
jbarnard@vtmd.org

Stephanie Winters
Executive Director, American Academy of Pediatrics - Vermont, Vermont Academy of Family Physicians
swinters@vtmd.org

Jessica Barquist
Vice President of Public Affairs, VT, Planned Parenthood of Northern New England
Jessica.Barquist@ppnne.org

Eric Covey
Interim Executive Director, VNAs of Vermont
eric@vnavt.org

Patrick Gallivan
Executive Director, Vermont State Dental Society
patrick.gallivan@vsds.org

Devon Green
SVP of Policy and Strategy, Vermont Association of Hospitals and Health Systems
devon@vahhs.org

Amy Johnson
Director of Government Affairs and Public Policy, Vermont Care Partners
amy@vermontcarepartners.org

Mary Kate Mohlman
Director of Vermont Public Policy, Bi-State Primary Care Association
mmohlman@bistatepca.org

Susan Ridzon
Executive Director, HealthFirst
sr@vermonthealthfirst.org

Michele Wade
President, Vermont Nurse Practitioners Association
Vermontnp@gmail.com

Emily Zolten
President, Vermont Affiliate of the American College of Nurse Midwives

Betsy Hasson
Immediate Past President, American Nursing Association - Vermont
betsy.hassan.dnp@gmail.com