

# 802 VERMONT UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE COALITION

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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

## NEW COALITION URGES UNIVERSAL, PUBLICLY FINANCED HEALTH CARE

A group of organizations calling itself the 802 Vermont Universal Health Care Coalition has issued a statement (see below) supporting renewed efforts to move the state toward universal, publicly financed health care. The coalition believes there is an impending crisis in health care that can only be averted by treating health care as a public good, and financing it accordingly.

The members of 802 Vermont Universal Health Care Coalition, with media contacts, are as follows:

**American Civil Liberties Union, Vermont:** James Lyall [jlyall@aclvt.org](mailto:jlyall@aclvt.org), Falko Schilling [fschilling@aclvt.org](mailto:fschilling@aclvt.org)

**American Federation of Teachers, Vermont:** Matt McGrath [matt.mcgrath@aftvermont.org](mailto:matt.mcgrath@aftvermont.org), Lisa Gerlach [lisa.gerlach@aftvermont.org](mailto:lisa.gerlach@aftvermont.org)

**Public Assets Institute:** Bekah Mandell [bekah@publicassets.org](mailto:bekah@publicassets.org)

**Rights and Democracy, Vermont:** Alison Nihart [alison@radmovement.org](mailto:alison@radmovement.org)

**Rural Vermont:** Mollie Wills [mollie@ruralvermont.org](mailto:mollie@ruralvermont.org)

**Service Employees International Union, Committee of Interns and Residents:** Alyssa Ruiz Nicholson [aruiz@cirseiu.org](mailto:aruiz@cirseiu.org), Roberto Jimenez [rjimenez@cirseiu.org](mailto:rjimenez@cirseiu.org)

**Vermont Health Care for All:** Deb Richter [drdebvt@aol.com](mailto:drdebvt@aol.com), Ellen Oxfeld [oxfeld@middlebury.edu](mailto:oxfeld@middlebury.edu)

**Vermont Public Interest Research Group:** Liz Edsell [ledsell@vpirg.org](mailto:ledsell@vpirg.org), Jordan Heiden [jheiden@vpirg.org](mailto:jheiden@vpirg.org), Joshua Ferguson [jferguson@vpirg.org](mailto:jferguson@vpirg.org)

**Vermont Racial Justice Alliance:** Mark Hughes [mark@vtracialjusticealliance.org](mailto:mark@vtracialjusticealliance.org)

**Vermont Workers' Center:** Ellen Schwartz [eschwal@myfairpoint.net](mailto:eschwal@myfairpoint.net)

## Statement of the 802 Vermont Universal Health Care Coalition

Everyone knows that health care in Vermont is dangerously close to collapse. Hospitals teeter on the brink of closure, practicing doctors struggle to stay afloat, more and more Vermonters can't afford to get health care even if they already pay exorbitant premiums for insurance.

In addition, we face massive new problems, including:

- Reduced subsidies for Obamacare—resulting in, on average, a doubling of premiums for many thousands of Vermonters.
- Shrinking Medicaid eligibility—resulting in an estimated 45,000 Vermonters losing Medicaid coverage in the next several years because of federal changes to the program.
- Gradual privatization of Medicare—resulting in an increase in access issues as the federal government promotes Medicare administered by private insurers.

As these current and impending disasters threaten every segment of our health care, our leaders avoid any realistic effort to prevent collapse. Vermont's many unsuccessful efforts at reform have not addressed the underlying causes that divert resources to administrative waste instead of health care—a fragmented system with multiple plans and obstacles to care. All of the approaches so far have made administrative complexity worse and have not ensured health care for all.

Vermont's Principles for Health Reform require that “Vermont must assure universal access to and coverage for high-quality, medically necessary health services for all Vermonters. Systemic barriers, such as cost, must not prevent people from accessing necessary health care.” (18VSA §9371)

We are a coalition of diverse Vermont organizations that believe it is time to fulfill the promise made by the State of Vermont and ensure that all have access to the care they need. We believe that the only way to save our system is to publicly finance our health care based on ability to pay, to stop wasting money on insurance company middlemen, and to make health care a true public good. To achieve this goal, we support the following principles:

1. Universality. All people meeting a definition of Vermont residents are covered.
2. Public financing to replace private insurance; no patient cost-sharing.
3. In the absence of waivers, wraps around existing federal programs.
4. Can be phased in as long as each phase covers everyone (ie., universal hospital care, universal primary care) as we work toward a comprehensive system.
5. High quality. Emphasis on community-based primary care.
6. Cost control achieved by administrative efficiency; negotiated rates.

Health care for all can no longer be ignored by our Legislature. It is time for our legislators to fulfill the promise of affordable health care for all Vermonters. It is not possible to kick the can down the road anymore when our health care system is in crisis. We demand that our state legislators take up legislation that will implement the principles laid out in existing statute (encoded through Act 48 of 2011) for universal, publicly financed health care.

In addition to the above formal statement, coalition participants made the following individual remarks:

Deb Richter, President, Vermont Health Care for All:

“Imagine if your doctor diagnosed you with Stage 3 cancer and said, 'Let's just tinker around the edges.' You wouldn't tolerate it for a second. Yet that's exactly what we're doing with health reform. We're managing symptoms while the cancer spreads. We pass incremental tweaks, commission studies — and 'wait for it to work'—while Vermonters struggle to find care, afford prescriptions, or keep their coverage. We need real reform.”

Mollie Wills, Director of Grassroots Organizing, Rural Vermont:

“Locally and nationally, farmers identify healthcare as a significant issue affecting their farms, livelihoods, and communities. The cost of health insurance is a major barrier to farming in Vermont, and despite working of the most dangerous jobs, many farmers and farmworkers lack access to care. We need to come together to implement a universal healthcare system as quickly and effectively as possible.”

Nicole DiVita, President for Healthcare, AFT Vermont:

“As healthcare workers, we understand firsthand how our current healthcare system isn't designed in the best interests of our patients or healthcare workers. It's time to end a system that treats healthcare as a profit center and build a system that guarantees our right to publicly funded healthcare where workers are treated with respect and as partners in determining how proper care is delivered.”

Ellen Schwartz on behalf of Vermont Workers Center:

“Since Vermont's failure to fund the universal healthcare law it passed in 2011, the state has tinkered around the edges of a system that is now careening into disaster. Various band-aid “solutions” haven't worked because they fail to address what even public officials admit are structural problems with our healthcare system. We call on our legislature to guarantee accessible and affordable healthcare by fulfilling the promise laid out in existing law. Let's finish the job!”

Alison Nihart on behalf of Rights and Democracy, Vermont/New Hampshire:

“All Vermonters deserve health care as a human right, and it's time for the state to follow through on the obligation it made 15 years ago. The legislature has multiple viable pathways to reach universal coverage. It should not be a question of whether it should happen, but rather how to most quickly and effectively implement a universal system.”