



## **House Health Care Committee**

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Planned Parenthood of Northern New England provides comprehensive reproductive and sexual health care to nearly 16,000 people in Vermont at seven health centers located in Burlington, Williston, St. Johnsbury, Barre, White River Junction, Rutland, and Brattleboro and virtually through our telehealth program. People turn to us for affordable, high-quality care including wellness exams, birth control, sexually transmitted infection testing and treatment, cancer screenings, abortion care, gender-affirming care, as well as a variety of limited primary care services. We see everyone who comes to us regardless of their ability to pay, and 54% of our patients have low incomes (defined as less than twice the Federal Poverty level). Last fiscal year, we provided \$1.3m in free and discounted care to our communities in Vermont, an increase from \$802,000 the previous fiscal year.

Sexual and reproductive health care providers play a unique role in the state's health care system. First, we sit on the frontlines. We see all patients regardless of their ability to pay and are an integral part of the state's safety net. We provide time sensitive care, reserving time on our schedule each day for same-day appointments because much of our care begins with addressing an acute need - a patient's birth control prescription is about to expire, they felt a lump in their breast, they are experiencing painful periods, or they are worried they have an infection. Patients also turn to Planned Parenthood for primary care services, such as blood pressure checks, anemia testing, and screenings for cholesterol, diabetes, and thyroid. We are often the first and only health care provider a patient may see in a year due to the patient being uninsured or having a low income. We screen patients for mental health, safety and intimate partner violence, substance use disorders, and other social and mental determinants of health. Because of the unique relationship we have with our patient population, patients are much more likely to disclose these deeply personal health issues to our staff. Patients have a deep level of trust in us because of the high-quality care we provide and the high level of honesty we offer as a sexual and reproductive health provider. Planned Parenthood is in an incomparable position to screen and

educate patients, their families, and our local communities about behavioral health and the importance of both prevention and treatment. It's this trusting relationship that has led to an expansion of care to meet the needs of our patients more directly. The reality is that, today, a patient walking through our doors receives far more than a prescription to birth control or a Pap test.

Not only are we a trusted health care provider in the state but we also provide public health services including free and low-cost sexual education at schools and community locations across the state. Stats on how education leads to lower sti and unplanned pregnancy rates. We also operate a grant program from the dept of health which allows us to provide free condoms to middle and high schools.

We accept patients with Medicaid, Medicare, MVP, BlueCross BlueShield, and many other private insurances, and we accept patients without insurance. Low or no cost care is always available for eligible patients. We have very generous donors and over the years we are asking them to take on more and more of the patient care costs. We provide donor supported funding for eligible patients to cover the costs of care for abortion services, gender affirming hormone therapy (GAHT), and cancer screening. Our payor mix is roughly 28% Government and 50% commercial with 22% self-pay.

A significantly broken health care system coupled with endless political attacks at the national level has left Planned Parenthood of Northern New England with a funding gap of more than \$8.6 million over the next three years.

This gap is driven by systemic failures within the health care industry which undervalues the care we provide. The pandemic, inflation, increased demand for our free and discounted care, and insufficient reimbursement rates, have all compounded to make this situation worse.

And unfortunately, we only expect our funding gap to grow under the Trump Administration, who is already promising to slash our funding and remove us from programs that serve low-income Vermonters.

These concerns about federal attacks on services are shared among our patient base as well. Following the election, PPNNE saw an uptick in appointment requests for long-acting reversible contraception (LARCs). These methods of birth control include the implant and intrauterine devices – IUDs– which can last from between three and twelve years respectively. In the week following the election, LARC appointment bookings at PPNNE health centers in Vermont more than doubled – from an average of 51 per week pre-election to 105.

PPNNE is also seeing a post-election uptick in the number of vasectomy consultation appointments, the first step in booking the procedure at PPNNE. Numerous patients who receive gender affirming care at PPNNE have called and messaged the organization and voiced their fears about not having access to the service in the future. Our patients are afraid that the care they rely on and the provider that they rely on might not be there for them in the future. We are doing everything we can to make sure that doesn't come to pass. We have seen the impact of closed Planned Parenthood health centers within our state and it is our goal to continue to provide care across the state for many years to come. In 2022, PPNNE was facing a financial deficit, similar to where we are right now, and was forced to close four health centers (Bennington, Hyde Park, Middlebury and St. Albans).

PPNNE is pursuing many strategies to address the financial gap. These include renegotiating contracts with our insurance payers; using new technology that makes the patient experience more efficient and allow us to see more patients overall; conducting research into our key services and identifying opportunities to expand our offerings; conducting a footprint analysis of our health centers; and enacting various cost-saving measures. We also need the Legislature's help to keep our doors open and to keep access to sexual and reproductive health care protected for all patients and providers in the state. We are hoping that we can work together to think of creative solutions that will keep Vermont a safe haven and a model of sexual and reproductive health care.