

STATE AUDITOR DOUG HOFFER

Press Release

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Audit of Blueprint for Health Finds Program Is Not Demonstrating Whether It Improves Vermonters' Health and Saves Money

Analyses of Impact on Statewide Health Outcomes and Cost Savings Have Not Been Performed, Program Doesn't Have Current Strategic Plan, and Public Reporting Flaws Undermine Oversight

MONTPELIER, VT – State Auditor Doug Hoffer released an audit today of Vermont's Blueprint for Health program. The Blueprint, as it is called, aims to help primary care practices become and remain "patient-centered medical homes." It also pays for community health teams to assist these primary care practices to enhance preventative care services and coordinated care. The program was budgeted to spend about \$37 million annually in 2022 and 2023, with most of the money going directly to health care providers. The audit did not include Blueprint's expansion programs such as the Pregnancy Intention Initiative or Hub and Spoke opioid treatment system.

The core Blueprint program was established nearly twenty years ago to bring primary care practices up to the nationally recognized standard of care and services required to achieve patient-centered medical home status. These standards are intended to comprehensively improve health outcomes and help control costs. The audit set out to evaluate whether Blueprint measures and reports whether their efforts are delivering these results.

Auditor Hoffer said, "Blueprint's initial objectives were largely accomplished nearly a decade ago – things like health information technology and care coordination have become near-ubiquitous in Vermont's primary care landscape. With that initial goal long since achieved, we wanted to know if Blueprint can show that it *continues* to provide health and financial benefits through its efforts. Few government programs enjoy such positive reputations as the Blueprint, but that is not always a guarantee that a program is effective. Our independent and objective auditors, who are guided solely by what can be demonstrated with evidence, set out to answer these questions for Vermonters."

Highlights of the audit include:

- Overall, Blueprint has not sufficiently planned, analyzed, or reported its efforts to improve overall population health and to control health care costs. Without quantifiable goals and an assessment of progress towards those goals, the extent to which Blueprint is impacting Vermonter's health and controlling health care costs is unclear.
- Blueprint officials do not have a current strategic plan, despite being required to by statute. Strategic plans are critical to giving direction to an agency's work.
- Blueprint has not performed a recent credible assessment of the program's impact on cost savings. Instead, Blueprint has made misleading claims regarding program savings. In their 2023 Annual Report and elsewhere, Blueprint reported that they did an analysis which showed Blueprint's effectiveness in controlling health care costs, inferring the program saved almost \$3 billion between 2019 and 2022.
- Blueprint's public reporting did not reflect the impact of the Blueprint program because in their figures Blueprint included data of Vermonters *who were not part of the program* for most of the reported measures.

Hoffer said: "The Blueprint may well be having a positive impact on health outcomes and reducing health care spending, but the truth is that no one really knows. Blueprint officials need to re-commit themselves to evaluating their impacts.

"Primary care providers frequently talk about how important Blueprint payments are to their practices, and given the stress primary care providers are under I don't doubt that the Blueprint payments they receive are most welcome. The question for policymakers, though, is whether Blueprint's *program activities* are moving the needle on cost or quality. If not, the funds could be deployed to other proven strategies, or the funds could just be added to primary care reimbursement payments."

The audit made a number of recommendations to Blueprint officials that, if implemented, would establish targets and goals against which their performance can be judged.

"I am grateful that Blueprint leadership have concurred with all six of our recommendations, and I look forward to monitoring their progress implementing them," Hoffer added. "Given the continued, rapid rise in health care costs, Vermont desperately needs programs that keep people healthy and rein in costs. Our recommendations will help determine if Blueprint merits ongoing appropriations, or if primary care should be supported using different strategies."

The full audit can be found [here](#).