



Date: February 20, 2025
To: House and Senate Appropriations Committees
From: Tina Zuk, Government Relations Director, American Heart Association
Re: American Heart Association Budget Requests

On behalf of the American Heart Association, we would appreciate it if you would consider including the following in your FY26 budget.

- **\$150,000 to provide a grant program for Vermont schools most in need of resources to help implement cardiac emergency response plans.**

Vermont's cardiac arrest survival rate is among the lowest in the nation at 7.5% compared to the national average of 10.2%. That means most victims die.

Survival rates are low because only about 40% of people who suffer a cardiac arrest get the immediate help they need from lay responders before EMS arrives. And VT's rural nature delays response from even the best rescue services.

We're working to pass legislation ensuring that schools and sporting events have cardiac emergency response plans. Plans like these can double or triple survival rates by enabling a trained lay-responder team to take action.

The plans create an emergency team that is CPR trained, have AEDs well-placed and publicly accessible, make sure the devices are maintained, the plan is practiced with a drill and the team integrates with EMS.

While more than 200 Vermont schools have AEDs, this funding would help ensure equity by providing funds for schools that may have few resources. It could be used for AEDs and CPR training.

Cardiac arrests do happen at Vermont schools – 24 in the last ten years – including at the Milton vs. Barre basketball game on Jan. 3rd at Spaulding where 16 year-old [Milton sophomore Dominic Barcomb was saved](#) due to the cardiac emergency plan, training and quick response of Spaulding's staff and coaches.

This small investment could literally mean the difference between life and death.

- **Increase income eligibility for pregnant women under Dr. Dynasaur to 312%.**

Ensuring pregnant people have comprehensive coverage is critical for the health of both moms and babies. Access to care before, during, and after pregnancy is linked to lower maternal and infant mortality rates and helps reduce health disparities across all racial and ethnic groups.

Medicaid's lower cost-sharing provides better financial protection, making essential health care and treatments more accessible during a time when finances can be tight. This is especially important for pregnant people who may have CVD or other comorbidities.

- **Protect funding for Vermont's universal school meals program.**

For students and families, healthy school meals for all: ensures that all students receive two free, healthy meals every school day; reduces the burden on families to complete the eligibility paperwork; helps the family budget; ensures that students whose families may move in and out of eligibility or are in the foster care system always receive healthy meals; and mitigates stigma and lunch shaming. Universal meals make sure that kids can focus on learning. It's working.

- **Leave the base funding for early childhood education intact.**

Governor Scott's administration proposed diverting nearly \$20 million from Act 76 reserved childcare funds to other government expenses in their proposed 2026 budget, this before the bill has been properly implemented.

Research shows high-quality birth-to-five programs can lead to better outcomes in education, health, social behaviors, and employment.

Let's do everything we can to ensure Vermont kids get a healthy start. Vermont needs to use every dollar of childcare funding for its intended purpose, solving Vermont's childcare crisis.

- **Provide \$160,000 in funding for the creation of an online enforcement officer to prevent illegal online sales of tobacco products in Vermont.**

Through combined efforts of VDH, DLL and the AGO, Vermont has already collected over \$1 million in funds from online retailers who have settled lawsuits for illegally selling tobacco products in Vermont. This position would be dedicated to ensuring these sales do not happen, especially to youth in Vermont. And settlement funds could be dedicated to Vermont's Tobacco Control Program to prevent youth from getting hooked.