



February 19, 2026

Re: FY27 – Bridges to Health Funding

Dear Senator Perchlik and the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Ben Clements and I am a family doctor with UVM Health and an Associate Professor of Family Medicine with UVM Larner College of Medicine. I am speaking today on behalf of Bridges to Health and in support of their **\$500,000** funding request for **fiscal year 2027**.

I have been a volunteer for Bridges to Health for six years. My work with Bridges to Health began in 2020 when Naomi, knowing migrant workers had little access to primary care or transportation to pharmacies, wanted to do everything possible to reduce respiratory illness on Vermont's farms, reached out to me in hopes of bringing flu and COVID vaccines directly to the farms. This work has taken me all over the state, and together we've given well over a thousand vaccines. We've given vaccines in homes, in trailers, in milking parlors and outside in snowstorms, all for folks with significant barriers accessing our state health system. Our work matured into doing health screenings on both farms and in community meeting places, screening for hypertension, diabetes, depression, substance use disorders, etc. I'm also one of a few volunteers who provide triage support to the Bridges to Health Team.

The folks that Bridges to Health serves are the backbone of our state. I've gotten to work with people who milk cows, pick strawberries, harvest squash, build homes, apply roofs and wash dishes. Our farms rely on them. Our construction industry relies on them. Our service industry relies on them. And they rely on Bridges to Health.

Naomi and her team of community health workers are trusted and culturally competent liaisons between migrant workers and our state health system. Our vaccine outreach has reduced the burden of influenza and COVID for these essential workers. Bridges to Health's administrative support is responsible for nearly all enrollments in the Immigrant Health Insurance Program. And, their outreach and triage work connects to Primary Care, avoiding unnecessary and expensive Emergency Rooms.

I understand this is another year of tight budgets and yet I firmly believe that an investment in Bridges to Health is wise, and one that will save our taxpayers money.

Please support their funding request.

Sincerely,

Ben Clements, MD
Associate Professor
Department of Family Medicine
University of Vermont Medical Center
University of Vermont, Larner College of Medicine