



# PEOPLE'S HEALTH & WELLNESS CLINIC

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*Friday, January 24, 2025*

Testimony by Daniel Barlow, Executive Director, People's Health & Wellness Clinic

Dear Members of the Senate Health and Welfare Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of People's Health & Wellness Clinic, a vital healthcare resource for underserved and marginalized populations in Vermont.

## **Introduction to PHWC:**

Since 1994, People's Health & Wellness Clinic (PHWC) has provided free healthcare to uninsured and underinsured people in Central Vermont. Services include high quality medical, mental health, and oral health, which are provided at no cost to patients. PHWC also continues to provide extensive case management, referrals, and assistance enrolling in health insurance and financial assistance programs.

As a federally deemed free clinic, PHWC cannot charge for services and depends mostly on grants, donations, and municipal funding. Our annual budget is approximately \$440,000 and we are a small staff - five employees for a total of three full time positions. We operate with a hybrid model of professional staff and volunteers, ensuring that limited resources yield maximum community impact.

A vast majority of our care is provided by a roster of 40 volunteer doctors and nurses who come in once or twice a month to see patients. We also rely heavily on donated equipment and supplies from Central Vermont Medical Center and other healthcare providers in the region.

## **2024 PHWC patient data:**

PHWC cared for:

- 658 unduplicated patients, 229 of whom were new to the clinic.
- This included 545 medical visits and 440 dental visits.
- 85 patients received assistance in enrolling in Medicaid, another health insurance plan, and financial assistance programs.
- Patients came from 60 cities and towns in the region.
- From 2022 to 2024, PHWC saw a 40% increase in patients served at the clinic.

## **Among our patients:**

In 2021, more than half (55%) of our patients had health insurance, but could not find a PCP or afford OOP costs.

Most of our patients live in poverty. Nearly a quarter of our patients make less than \$14,000 a year and a vast majority are under 200% of FPL (about \$27,000 a year for a single person).

One quarter of our patients report that they have delayed care because of lack of access to a doctor.

Many of our patients are the working poor: 45% work full or part time while only 19% are unemployed.

#### **Expansion of Oral Health Program:**

With the support of increased legislative funding, PHWC expanded its oral health services to include extractions. This enhancement was made possible by the addition of a retired dental surgeon as a volunteer, allowing us to provide essential surgical services previously unavailable to our patients.

#### **LGBTQ+ Care Initiatives:**

Recognizing the unique healthcare needs of LGBTQ+ individuals, PHWC invested in staff and volunteer training on culturally competent, LGBTQ+ appropriate care. We established two monthly gender-affirming care clinics, providing hormone therapy, counseling, and support services.

#### **Addressing Xylazine Wounds in Partnership with VT Cares:**

In response to the growing prevalence of xylazine-related wounds, PHWC partnered with VT Cares to launch targeted initiatives:

- Held wound care clinics to treat complex, non-healing wounds associated with xylazine use.
- Trained staff and volunteers in advanced wound care techniques specific to xylazine wounds.
- Developed and distributed wound care kits that patients could take home,

ensuring continued care and reducing complications.

#### **Serving the Unhoused Community in Central Vermont:**

PHWC expanded services to address the unique challenges faced by unhoused individuals:

- Held offsite clinics at local hotels to reach patients where they are housed temporarily.
- Deployed nurses to warming shelters, providing immediate care and health screenings during the winter months.
- Launched a clothing shelf for patients, ensuring access to essential clothing and winter gear.

#### **Patient Testimonials:**

*“PHWC saved me from a dental infection that could have sent me to the ER. I couldn’t afford to see a dentist anywhere else.” – Anonymous Patient*

*“The gender-affirming care clinic is life-changing. It’s the only place where I feel truly seen and supported as a trans person.” – Anonymous Patient*

PHWC remains committed to bridging gaps in Vermont’s healthcare system. Thank you for your continued support and partnership in ensuring that all Vermonters, regardless of income or identity, can access the care they deserve.

Sincerely,

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