

State of Vermont

Department of Mental Health
280 State Drive, NOB 2 North
Waterbury, VT 05671-2010

<http://mentalhealth.vermont.gov/>

Agency of Human Services

[phone] 802-241-0090

[fax] 802-241-0100

[tty] 800-253-0191



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Media Contacts:

Alex Frantz | Department of Mental Health
802-904-3043

AHS.DMHCommunications@vermont.gov

Ben Truman | Department of Health
802-316-2117 / 802-863-7281

bennett.truman@vermont.gov

Vermont Awarded Grant to Expand Community-based Mental Health and Substance Use Services

WATERBURY, VT – A new federal grant will help Vermont provide mental health and substance use services to more people throughout the state.

The Vermont Department of Mental Health, in collaboration with the Department of Health, has been awarded a \$1 million, one-year state planning grant by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to develop a network of Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs).

“We’re excited and grateful to be one of just 15 states to have received this grant,” said Emily Hawes, Commissioner of the Department of Mental Health. “CCBHCs are next-level opportunities for us to build on the broad network of services Vermont has in place to support the mental and physical health of Vermonters,” she said. “This grant will help us continue our move from fee-for-service payment and support our new programs, such as the 9-8-8 National Suicide Prevention Line, and Mobile Crisis Response.”

CCBHCs are community-based mental health and substance use disorder treatment providers that offer a wide range of services, including 24/7 crisis care, outpatient mental health and substance use disorder treatment, primary care screening and monitoring, and peer support services. The new grant will support the development of a comprehensive statewide plan for CCBHCs in Vermont. This plan will include the solicitation of stakeholder and community input, establishing certification standards, and developing a reimbursement model for the implementation and sustainability of CCBHCs across the

state. The clinics must meet rigorous standards for quality of care and service delivery and provide evidence-based treatment services tailored to meet the unique needs of individuals and families.

“The CCBHC model supports our ongoing efforts to holistically integrate mental health and substance use programs into a comprehensive system of care that treats the whole person,” said Health Commissioner Mark Levine, MD. “This funding will help us provide even greater access to high-quality, evidence-based services when and where Vermonters need them.”

Under the new federal designation, states can receive Medicaid for a wider range of services and can typically offer them more widely, giving them a greater potential to help people before they are in crisis, Commissioner Hawes said. “CCBHCs will help Vermont expand access to high-quality, evidence-based care for all Vermonters and their families, no matter where they live,” she said.

Vermont Needs by the Numbers

- The number of youth and adults seeking emergency services increased by nearly 50% between 2019 and 2022.
- Substance-use related deaths in 2022 were the highest ever recorded in a calendar year in Vermont, with 237 known opioid-related accidental and undetermined deaths among Vermonters, with some death certificates still pending.
- Alcohol remains the most frequent substance related to a substance use disorder diagnosis, and alcohol-attributable deaths increased by 36% between 2017 and 2021 (328 in 2017 to 446 in 2021).
- Ninety-two percent of Vermonters who died of an accidental overdose in 2019 and 2020 had a substance use disorder diagnosis, and 53% had a mental health diagnosis.

At the state and national levels, the initiative has seen wide bipartisan support.

“My administration is committed to ensuring that everyone who needs mental health and substance use services has access to the care they need,” said Governor Phil Scott. “This grant will help us make progress towards that goal.”

“CCBHCs would build on our current system of care, helping to ensure access to integrated mental health and substance use services, provide 24-7 crisis services, and serve people who need care when and where they need it, regardless of their ability to pay,” said Senator Virginia “Ginny” Lyons, Chair of the Vermont Senate Committee on Health and Welfare and Representative Lori Houghton, Chair of the House Committee on Health Care, in a joint statement. “We are excited to explore the potential this model could bring to Vermont.”

Four of Vermont’s Designated Agencies (Clara Martin Center, Rutland Mental Health Services, Health Care and Rehabilitation Services, and Northeast Kingdom Human Services) are already implementing CCBHC Planning, Development, and Implementation or Improvement and Advancement grants with other agencies hoping to join in the future. Vermont Care Partners, which represents the state’s

Designated and Specialized Services Agencies, said they “look forward to continuing to work together with the Departments to further explore the benefits of becoming a CCBHC demonstration state.”

The Department of Mental Health, together with the Health Department, will begin work on program design in the summer, including soliciting input from individuals, families, providers, and community members about how the program should look in Vermont. The first part of the stakeholder process will consider a new name for the program. Vermont does not use the term “behavioral health” to describe mental health and substance use services. If you would like to stay informed about the progress on this change and to hear about opportunities to share your voice and experience, please sign up for our listserv at [this link](#). To stay informed about the program, please visit [Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics \(CCBHCs\) | Department of Mental Health \(vermont.gov\)](#)

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About the Department of Health

We have been the state's public health agency for more than 130 years, working every day to protect and promote the health of Vermonters.

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