



Annual Report - 2021

Connecting Vermonters to Healthcare Services

NINE CLINICS STATEWIDE

All VFRC services are free, whether providing direct medical or dental care, or assisting clients with gaining access to affordable health care options.

BURLINGTON
BARRE
MIDDLEBURY
RANDOLPH
WHITE RIVER JUNCTION
RUTLAND
WINDSOR
SPRINGFIELD
BENNINGTON

Compassionate professionals providing increased access to health care



OUR 9 MEMBER FREE CLINIC PROGRAMS INCLUDE:

- Bennington Free Clinic - Bennington, VT - *Medical and Dental Services*
- Good Neighbor Health Clinic & Red Logan Dental Clinic - White River Junction, VT - *Medical and Dental Services*
- Health Assistance Program at the University of Vermont Medical Center - Burlington, VT - *Referral & Enrollment Services*
- Health Connections at Gifford - Randolph, VT - *Referral & Enrollment Services*
- Open Door Clinic - Middlebury, VT - *Medical and Dental Services*
- People's Health & Wellness Clinic - Barre, VT - *Medical and Dental Services*
- Rutland County Free Clinic & Dental Clinic - Rutland, VT - *Medical and Dental Services*
- Valley Health Connections - Springfield, VT - *Referral & Enrollment Services*
- Windsor Community Health Clinic at Mt. Ascutney Hospital - Windsor, VT - *Referral & Enrollment Services*



Representatives of all nine member clinics of Vermont's Free & Referral Clinics met for Quarterly Board Meetings, as well as regularly via Zoom to provide one another with valuable resources and mutual support during another challenging year.

Mission Statement:

"To support member free clinics in Vermont that identify gaps and provide access to care, via on site or by referral services, to uninsured and under-insured people."

Who We Are:

Vermont's Free and Referral Clinics (VFRC) and its nine member clinics play a unique and vital role in healthcare delivery and public health efforts in Vermont. In 2021, our nine clinics collectively served over 10,000 patients from 215 of Vermont's 251 towns. We provide medical, dental, mental health services, as well as insurance enrollment and navigation, prescription assistance, referrals, and much more. We catch the people who would otherwise fall through the cracks of our healthcare and social services systems. Many of these patients face seemingly insurmountable barriers based on income, housing, language, immigration status, access to technology, and more. They often arriving having delayed care due to lack of access and/or financial constraints, and when they can't come to us, we go out into the community to meet them where they are. It is impossible to overstate the importance of our work as individual clinics and as a coalition - for more than 25 years, we have worked tirelessly to fill the gaps and meet the needs of some of the most vulnerable members of our communities.

Impact – in 2021, VFRC clinics:

- Conducted 8,198 medical and dental visits
- Cared for 10,128 patients
- In addition to medical and dental care, the clinics provided a wide range of consultations, case management, enrollment assistance and other support accessing services from personal care to childcare, totaling 33,340 instances of patient assistance
- Provided \$2.5 million worth of free medications
- Administered over 2,500 COVID-19 vaccines
- Were supported by more than 300 volunteers and 32 paid staff across all nine clinics

The value of these services in avoided Emergency Room and hospitalization charges is an estimated \$3.9 million.

In 2021, we experienced historic challenges and our clinics rose to meet the needs of the state's most vulnerable populations while also providing record-setting numbers of services as part of Vermont's COVID-19 response.

Below, we share our stories that speak to the resilience, partnerships, adaptability, and excellent patient-centered care. Our collective work largely prevents Vermont residents from falling through the cracks.

Stories of Our Clinics – 2021

HEALTH CONNECTIONS at GIFFORD MEDICAL CENTER

Randolph, Vermont

Identifying and removing barriers

One of the goals of Gifford’s Health Connection (referral model) and Financial Assistance Program is to help identify the barriers individuals and families face when attempting to access health care services including Medicaid and other qualified health plans offered by Vermont Health Connect. Whether it’s by referral from the medical center, FQHC or patients contacting us over the phone, our program is determined to assist those in need in all of the VHC and Green Mountain Care programs.

Our program also assists patients with the transition to Medicare. That includes exploring the different Medicare options, such as Medicare Advantage, Medicare D, and/or supplemental plans.

It is common for those on Medicare to find themselves with deductibles at the beginning of the year. When this occurs, we assist the patient in connecting with programs that help make pharmaceuticals more affordable such as VPharm through the State or Pharmacy Assistance Programs.

With the upcoming end of the Public Health Emergency (PHE), there may be Medicaid patients who face transitions in coverage. We will be working with those who are affected.

The last two years have had their challenges. Going through a Public Health Emergency has opened new avenues for interaction with our patients and this flexibility has helped us to reach more patients than we did previously. This has allowed us to reach those patients who do not have reliable or access to transportation, and those for whom distance may be a barrier.



giffordhealthcare.org

RUTLAND COUNTY FREE CLINIC

Rutland, Vermont

Reaching the medically underserved in 2021

Park Street Healthshare, Inc., dba Rutland County Free Clinic (RCFC) supported the State's public health efforts throughout 2021 by providing vaccinations and testing throughout Rutland County.



Our working adult patients have experienced job elimination or hourly reductions resulting in significant financial strain and an inability to afford a monthly health insurance premium that may provide preventive, chronic care or address acute illness without a high-cost deductible.

If not for Vermont's Free Clinics, then where?

This is the question that we have come to ask those who question the value and purpose of our organization.

When the Federally Qualified Health Care Centers (FQHC) need to turn away Medicaid patients, where do those patients go?



A dental consult with a patient in Tinmouth, VT. RCFC provides consultations, including COVID mitigation services, through community-based clinics across Rutland County.

When our Medicare recipients are unable to afford Part D, dental insurance or other supplemental coverage that make it possible for them to practice preventive healthcare or address their dental needs, what happens?

When a patient suffering from a chronic health condition (diabetes, asthma, hypertension) loses their health insurance and the ability to pay for their medications due to job loss or reduction, do they go without until they can find a way to pay for the medication and care they need?

When a person with acute tooth pain has no dental insurance, is their only recourse the ER?

These are only a few situations when the RCFC and other Free Clinics can provide help. We treat patients regardless of insurance status while helping them to locate a primary care provider, and continue to treat them until they obtain their first appointment with that new provider which can take up to a year or more.

We treat oral infections, provide fillings and extractions as well as oral health care supplies and education to help our patients improve their oral health and maintain a healthier mouth until they can find a permanent dental home.

We work with patients to ensure they never go without the medication they need and that all adults living in Rutland County have equitable access to our services, even our older Vermonters who find they are unable to afford the several hundred dollars needed to protect themselves from the Shingles virus.

Vermont's Free Clinics are an important and vital part our public healthcare system. RCFC is grateful for the many clinical volunteers that answer our call, Rutland Regional Medical Center, and VT Medical Reserve Corps. (when our clinical needs exceed our capacity) and the collaborating agencies, organizations and community leaders throughout our County that share our vision "That good health is attainable and achievable for all those in need. ❤️"



Rutland County Free Clinic partnering with the Vermont Department of Health to provide a COVID vaccine clinic in Pawlet, VT.

PEOPLE'S HEALTH & WELLNESS CLINIC

Barre, Vermont

Succeeding during a year of transitions

The year 2021 was one of transition for People's Health and Wellness Clinic. The organization said goodbye to Rebecca Goldfinger-Fein, who stepped down as director in the late summer. She was replaced with Daniel Barlow, the organization's new director, who started in December. Throughout this transition, the clinic kept operating through the hard work of the staff and volunteer board, including Nicole Valcour, the director of clinical services who served as the organization's interim executive director.

But the most dramatic change was purchase and renovation of the organization's new building at 51 Church Street in Barre. The clinic raised more than \$375,000 from supporters in a unique financing deal that has allowed us to move into a permanent facility that we are on track to completely own in less than 10 years. This new building brings dignity and sophistication to the work of the clinic and the patients we serve.

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact nearly every aspect of the clinic's work. Telehealth services are now a permanent and ongoing part of the clinic's work. Adjusting to the technology and meeting the needs of our patients continues to be a work in progress and an adjustment for staff and volunteer providers. Demands for the clinic's services were on a level with previous years, but technology gaps with our patient population meant that some patients delayed check-ups until in-person clinics were resumed.

Still, there were many successes in 2021 to celebrate. PHWC's dental program continues to attract new patients and provide a valuable resource for community members who fall through the cracks between public and private health insurance programs.

"Michelle" was a new patient to the clinic in the fall of 2021. A year earlier, she noticed that one of her front teeth was loose. Even though the patient was insured

through Medicaid, they didn't know that they had access to \$1,000 per year of dental benefits, so they paid out-of-pocket for a consultation with a dentist who doesn't accept Medicaid. That process left the patient with a \$8,900 estimate for deep cleanings, x-rays, extractions, and a partial denture. Michelle was overwhelmed and afraid as they knew they could not afford these costs.

Luckily, the clinic was able to help. The patient was quickly scheduled with Joanne Puente, the clinic's dental hygienist, for a cleaning and x-rays. Joanne also managed to find Michelle a local dentist who accepts Medicaid and the patient learned that her dental problems were not as severe as she was initially told. Michelle had her problem tooth extracted and was fitted with a temporary partial denture for a fraction of the cost they were initially quoted.



Dental staff at PHWC preparing the exam room for the next patient.



**PEOPLE'S HEALTH
& WELLNESS CLINIC**

WINDSOR COMMUNITY HEALTH CLINIC AT MOUNT ASCUTNEY HOSPITAL

Windsor, Vermont

Supporting community sustainability

A patient presented to the Mt. Ascutney Hospital Emergency Room after a friend noticed that he looked yellow. The patient was uninsured and very nervous about being in an emergency room and not knowing how he would cover the cost. He was quickly admitted to the inpatient unit and soon after found out that his liver was failing and he would need a transplant as soon as possible. The patient needed to be transferred to another facility but would not be accepted anywhere unless insurance was in place. Windsor Community Health Clinic (WCHC) staff were called to assist the patient in applying for insurance and to work with the accepting facility to make sure they received the insurance information.



**Mt. Ascutney Hospital
and Health Center**
Dartmouth-Hitchcock

An insurance application was filled out and the WCHC case worker worked with Vermont Health Connect to have the insurance effectuated by the end of the day. The case worker was able to give an active insurance number to the hospital case worker so that transfer could be arranged. Not only did this work help the hospital staff facilitate the patient's needs, but it was a great relief to the patient knowing that he could focus on his care and not on the cost and inability to pay for the care that he needed.

OPEN DOOR CLINIC

Middlebury, Vermont

A Tuesday Open Door story

At one point in 2021, as we were in the midst of our Tuesday evening clinic, in walked a group of eight people: men, women, and children; all of whom we were not expecting. They had just arrived in Vermont from Mexico that morning. Through their journey here, after walking across the desert and making it to Vermont, some had injuries, some were seeking medical appointments, but all were in search of one thing: COVID vaccines. We were amazed by this. After all they had been through to get here, their priority seemingly remained to protect themselves and others against COVID. They had heard of us through family members in the community and were directed here to have their medical needs tended to. Then and there, we took them all on as patients, got them all vaccinated with either first, second, or booster vaccines, and inquired about what their medical needs were.



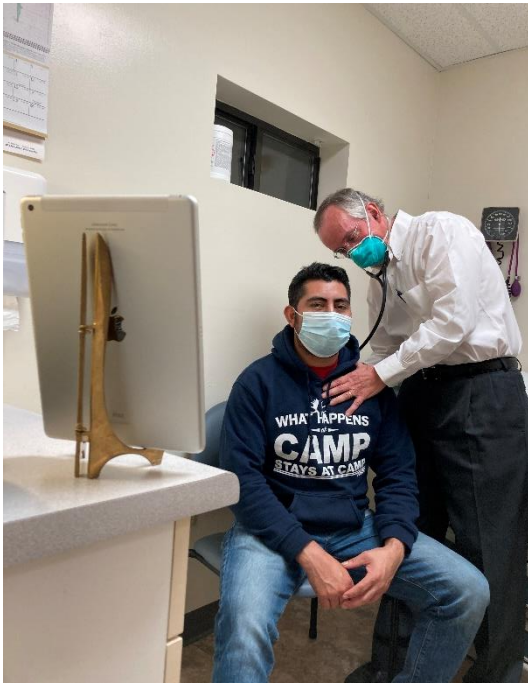
One woman in the group was suffering from an eye injury that she had obtained a week earlier from a tree branch while walking across the desert. She had loss of vision, swelling, and redness. A nurse had a look, discussed the case with our volunteer doctor at clinic that night, and we made the decision to bring her to the ER that night. One of our Spanish speaking colleagues completed the financial assistance application with

her, walked her up to the ER where she was evaluated, and the attending doctor immediately got her scheduled with an eye surgeon the following day. We followed up with her the next morning, and learned she was unable to pay for the eye surgeon appointment so was going to skip the appointment. We knew we had to find a solution to get her seen quickly. Our nurse called UVM Medical Center Ophthalmology, explained the situation and circumstances – she was a Spanish speaker, with a traumatic eye injury, with zero dollars, living in rural Addison County. UVMMC understood the complexity and seriousness of the situation and we worked together to get her in to an appointment at UVMMC within the next 30 minutes from the start of that phone call. They told us, do not worry about finances, and it is okay if she is late, let's just get her in asap. And we did – she arrived within 30 minutes to Burlington, was seen, and her eye was tended to. It has healed and her vision is back.

All the women of the group were seeking birth control as well, some as young as 18, some 35 years old. They had no forms of birth control with them or in them. We had conversations about birth control and provided condoms in the meantime. However, we only had a few remaining. So, we called Porter Women's Health, asked if we could have some condoms to hand out, and they gave us a large bag. The following day, Vermont Department of Health also provided us with a large bag of condoms. That same day, we made calls to Planned Parenthood in Middlebury* and got all the women in for appointments at PPNNE. As a result, they were all able to get their preferred form of birth control. This empowered them to take control of their bodies and their lives so that they can best provide for themselves, their families, and the children they had to leave in Mexico.



Patients queuing to receive COVID vaccines during an onsite farm visit. ODC administered hundreds of vaccines at the clinic and in the field over the course of 2021.



A volunteer performs a routine exam during a Tuesday night clinic at Open Door Clinic with the assistance of a remote interpreter on the tablet.

Another gentleman, who has been a long-time patient of ours, has been struggling intensely with skin issues. He had been seen by Four Seasons Dermatology in the past, but all treatments that have been tried were not fully effective. After some phone calls with Four Seasons, we collaborated to find another treatment plan for this gentleman. He had two options for a new treatment: biologics: which cost thousands per week – or light therapy: which requires 3 sessions per week for 8 weeks. Biologics quickly became out of the question due to cost. Out of the goodness of his heart, the leading doctor at Four Seasons said he would treat this gentleman with light therapy for free if he could commit to 3 sessions per week for 8 weeks. The patient was not able to commit to that treatment regimen given his work schedule and lack of transportation to Colchester from the farm. Regardless, we admired the generosity of Four Seasons, and their willingness to treat this man free of charge.

*We are sad that the PPNNE clinic in Middlebury had to close their doors in June 2022, recognizing that this leaves a big hole in our community.

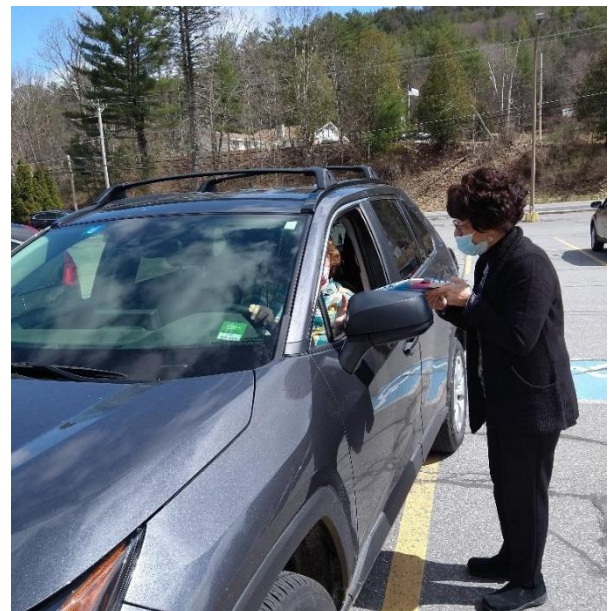
VALLEY HEALTH CONNECTIONS

Springfield, Vermont

Meeting patients' needs - access, enrollment, and case management

As a Referral Clinic during the Pandemic much of our focus is always on identifying barriers to care and helping patients get access to the services they need to maintain and become healthy. Our staff seamlessly transitioned to remote work with patients. As restrictions were loosened, we began offering drive up appointments to patients. Many of those seeking our services likened it to A&W carhops. In fact, it has become so popular for patients with limited mobility, that it will continue even after all restrictions are lifted.

When testing and vaccinations become available, our patients were asked to register for a test or vaccine clinic, we found lots of confusion about the process. Our staff quickly responded



As COVID restrictions loosened, Valley Health began to offer drive up appointments to patients. This proved to be very popular.

by working with the local hospital and FQHC partners to outreach the vulnerable populations and help with registration, identify clinics/testing sites in our area, and work through access issues.

Many of our senior population were particularly stressed by the process. We saw an older man drive up outside our clinic one day. He was registered for a Springfield Hospital vaccination site, but there was no clinic operating there that day. He was almost 90, confused, and really anxious to get the vaccine. We made a few calls on his behalf and the site he had registered for was in Weston, about 40 miles away. We contacted the head of Infection Control at the Hospital reviewed the patient's situation and needs. We set up an appointment for him to go to the hospital the next morning and get his vaccination. He never had to leave his car, he was going to a place he knew well, and he was going to be vaccinated. There should really be no wrong door when trying to seek healthcare access. In our region, we try to be that door.

As we approach 2022, we are preparing and personally reaching out to more than 2,000 patients who we have assisted with Medicaid enrollment in the last two years. As the Feds discontinue the Public Health Emergency later in 2022, thousands of Vermonters around the state will be asked to go through the Medicaid Review process for the first time since 2019. We are updating their contact information, addresses, and preparing them for the review process. Our goal is to help them transition to a new plan, or re-enroll without interruption to Medicaid. It is the best way we know to provide continuity and quality of care to all Vermonters.

GOOD NEIGHBOR HEALTH CLINIC & RED LOGAN DENTAL CLINIC

White River Junction, Vermont

Partnerships that save lives and change lives

Funding from the Vermont Department of Health has saved lives and changed lives. Imagine being a son who has never seen his mother smile. When the Red Logan Dental Clinic provided dentures to a 52-year-old woman, we changed her life. With tears of gratitude, our patient thanked us for allowing her to smile confidently with her family for the first time.



A dental exam performed at the Red Logan Dental Clinic. The clinic significantly increased capacity for dental patients in 2021 following the hire of a full-time dentist.

“Isabel”, a long time Good Neighbor

Health Clinic patient, called us when she was experiencing chest pain. Since she refused to call an ambulance,

preferring to walk, the Clinic assured her that if she took an Uber to the local hospital, we would cover the expense. She was diagnosed with an acute myocardial infarction and was admitted. Isabel spoke very little English, did not have medical or prescription insurance, and her closest relative lived in Canada. With the assistance of Good Neighbor staff, the hospital approved a request for free care and an application for prescription assistance was completed. Soon after discharge, the Clinic Nurse Case Manager arranged to check on Isabel. A complicated medication regimen was sorted out, a referral to a local specialist was completed, and the Clinic paid for medication until the patient assistance program was obtained. As an update, Isabel is now planning to join her daughter in Canada.

A Life: Jason Moots; 1976-2021

Jim Kenyon of the Valley News wrote an article about Jason Moots on January 30, 2022:

<https://www.vnews.com/-An-Indication-of-How-Little-We-Value-the-Unhoused-44733485>. Jason who was homeless had died of a fentanyl overdose in the woods of White River Junction. The article mentioned the local businesses and social service agencies that tried to help Jason. The article did not mention the care that Jason received from the Good Neighbor Health Clinic.

Dr. John Sanders, a Good Neighbor volunteer, subsequently wrote:

I'm never sure where HIPAA ends, but many of us at the Good Neighbor Health Clinic cared for Jason Moots over the years and mourn his loss. We felt very comforted by your "A Life" article for him this morning! While we care for many people, the truly homeless are our special concern. Those who come through the Haven often have different reasons for being homeless, and a lot of support going forward. Those who, like Jason, have heavy mental health/substance misuse problems, and are reduced to "camping out", especially in NH/VT, are lost to most of us. And your front page article on Jason goes a long way toward bringing many of us back to being aware of just who our Neighbor might be. Many thanks!



The Valley News article speculates that Jason might have fared better if he was less isolated during the pandemic. Prior to losing his job in Norwich, clinic staff regularly visited Jason on their way home from work.

They offered him a free iPad (grant funded) and wi-fi connectivity. The logistics of which were more than Jason cared to navigate. Clinic staff willingly made the extra effort to care for Jason and were saddened to learn of his death.



THE HEALTH ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AT THE UVM MEDICAL CENTER

Burlington, Vermont

Working tirelessly to provide vital services while adjusting to the “new normal”

“I want to thank you so much for this program. It's made such a difference in my life. I don't have to worry my medication costs are taking away my grocery money. I can actually get all of my medication now and that keeps me in good health with less stress about money.”

-Shirley P., April 2021

At The University of Vermont Medical Center’s Health Assistance Program (“HAP”), messages like the one above are welcome reminders that our work continues to have a meaningful impact on the lives of patients. In 2021, our staff worked tirelessly despite the ongoing challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic to continue administering HAP’s key services.

Over the course of the year, approximately 4,300 unique patients received support through one of HAP’s programs. Nearly 2,500 eligible patients received their medications at no cost through HAP’s signature prescription assistance program, and many others were recipients of financial support for much-needed durable medical equipment and eyeglasses. Additionally, HAP’s amazing staff members assisted hundreds of patients with Medicaid and Medicare Part D enrollment so that they can access the healthcare and services they need to remain healthy.

