

## **HealthFirst 2025 Annual Meeting**

On November 8, HealthFirst members gathered for a meeting full of connection and hopeful conversation. After sharing organizational updates, we welcomed several new members to HealthFirst. We then turned to a compelling discussion on AI in medicine, where Dr. Julie Lin and Eryney Marrogi broke down emerging technologies with clarity and humor. Next, Chris Pearson, Chair of VT Healthcare 911, underscored the importance of holding hospital leadership accountable. We closed with an insightful update from Owen Foster, Chair of the Green Mountain Care Board, on Vermont's healthcare system and the work ahead. Overall, the meeting was energizing and informative!



### ***The 2025 Haddock Independence Award Goes to Dr. Peter Casson of Northeastern Reproductive Medicine!***

Dr. Hannah Rabin presented this year's Haddock award to Dr. Peter Casson, who truly embodies the spirit of this award. Dr. Jennifer Brown writes, "Peter changed the landscape of reproductive medicine for all in Vermont and our northeastern region. Most importantly, he created competition, which lowered prices, which - in a field of medicine unfortunately not always covered by insurance - greatly increased access to care. It cannot be understated what Peter and his partner Chris Murray accomplished." Congrats, Dr. Casson! Thank you for all that you've done for Vermont!



**Congratulations to the 2026 HealthFirst Board of Directors!**



Pictured left to right: Armando Ciampa, David Simcoe, Cory Halliburton, Scott McQuilkin, Jennie Lowell, Hannah Rabin, Dan Goodyear, Phil Kiely, and Vincent Miller. Not pictured: Michael Visker and Jennifer Carlson

**2025 Practice Managers Day!**

HealthFirst hosted an event for practice managers on Nov 7th. Reilly DiPlacido from Triumph HR and Paul Lunn from Deland, Gibson Insurance facilitated a lively discussion of creative strategies for recruiting, hiring, and retaining staff.

Members also heard about Age Well Vermont from Tracy Shamberger and Vermont Diagnostic Imaging from Bridget Thompson.



Age Well has extended an open invitation to provide HealthFirst practices with a presentation showcasing the valuable programs and supports available to older Vermonters, their families, and caregivers.

Sessions are offered at no cost and are a great opportunity to refresh your team's knowledge and learn how to better support your older patients!

**To schedule a presentation, contact Tracey**  
[Tshamberger@agewellvt.org](mailto:Tshamberger@agewellvt.org), 802-662-5271

If you'd like to take advantage of the Triumph HR benefit, please contact Reilly DiPlacido.



**Reilly DiPlacido**

Founder & CEO  
Triumph HR



## **New HealthFirst Members in 2025!**



### **New Practices**

- **Green Mountain Hernia Specialists, PLLC** - Christopher Bartels, MD
- **Vermont Plastic Surgery** - Alexandra Schmidt, MD
- **Manchester Medical Center** - Thomas Sterling, DO & Kate Howard, MD
- **Partners in Integrative Healing** - Jada Khosla, MD, Maya Carlet, DNP, Irene Chamberlain, PA-C
- **True Path Wellness** - Sarah Dudley, FNP
- **Mint Health** - Sara Headley, FNP and Sarah Bouchard, NP
- **Burlington Podiatry** - Morgan Hebert, DPM
- **Vermont Adult Primary Care** - Jolanta Amblo, MD, PhD (opens 2026)



### **New Clinicians**

- **Jonathan Cahoon, PA** - Champlain Medical Urgent Care
- **Thomas Davis, PA & Brooke Palmer, PA** - Four Seasons Dermatology
- **Timothy Dominick, MD & Corey Sheahan, MD** - Anesthesia Associates of VT
- **Ariel Gallant-Bernstein, MD** - Richmond Pediatric & Adolescent Medicine
- **Lauren Jarvis, DO & Sarah Peters, MD** - Maitri Health Care for Women
- **Allison Mack, NP** - Vermont Gastroenterology
- **Veronica Peterkin, MD** - Vermont Gynecology
- **Peter Rapoza, MD** - Ophthalmic Consultants of Vermont
- **Suzanne Skarsten, FNP** - White River Family Practice
- **Minta Trivette, APRN** - Richmond Family Medicine

# Advocacy & Health System Reform Updates

**UVMHN Settlement Funds:** In April, the GMCB and UVMHN agreed to a settlement requiring UVMHN to provide \$11 million in FY26 to support non-hospital primary care providers through a legally compliant mechanism of its choosing. The intent was to help OneCare-participating, non-hospital primary care practices maintain funding in 2026, when neither OneCare programs nor the federal AHEAD model will be available. On Nov 7, the GMCB issued a memo approving UVMHN's plan to distribute the funds in full to non-hospital primary care in the OneCare network based on 2025 payment estimates for OneCare's PHM and CPR Programs. Two disbursements will occur January 1 and June 30, 2026. OneCare will report to the GMCB on the total funds released and the list of practices that received settlement funds. HealthFirst will share additional details as available.



**Healthcare Reform Oversight Committee:** This important oversight committee will meet on December 4 to hear updates from the Agency of Human Services, the Green Mountain Care Board (GMCB), and other stakeholders. Discussion topics will include hospital transformation efforts, the Rural Healthcare Transformation application, open enrollment, and strategies for sustaining accountable care organization capabilities. View the full agenda [here](#).

## **Advocacy & Health System Reform Updates (con't)**

**Rural Healthcare Transformation Program (H.R.1):** Vermont Agency of Human Services (AHS) publicly released its application for the Rural Health Transformation Fund, a national \$50 billion initiative distributed over years 2026–2030. Vermont's specific award will be announced by the end of Dec, after the federal government reviews & scores Vermont's application. The full application & summary available [here](#).

HealthFirst has been advocating with AHS for funding to support & expand Vermont's network of independent providers. We are hopeful that the program ultimately will include such support & result in a true positive transformation of Vermont's healthcare system. We will continue to stay closely engaged with this important program that will undoubtedly shape the future of Vermont's healthcare system.



**Vermont Hospital Transformation Update:** The Agency of Human Services recently released an [update](#) on Vermont's healthcare transformation activities, offering a narrative report on recent discussions with hospital leaders across the state. The update outlines key outcomes and next steps, highlighting hospitals' interest in stronger communication, more coordinated patient transfers, and expanded shared services. Note that this hospital transformation work was prompted by the Oliver Wyman report mandated by Act 167 of 2022. More information [here](#).



# Advocacy & Health System Reform Updates (con't)

## Healthcare Reform Committees Mandated by Act 68 of 2025

Act 68 of 2025 called for the creation of two committees that have both recently started meeting to work on fulfilling their responsibilities:

### **Vermont Steering Committee for Comprehensive Primary Health Care**

- Charged with informing the work of State government, including the Blueprint for Health & AHS's Office of Health Care Reform, as it relates to access to, delivery of, & payment for primary care services in Vermont.
- Meeting agendas & minutes can be found [here](#).
- [Joe Nasca, MD](#), from Georgia Pediatrics and [Rick Dooley, PA](#), are representing independent practices on the committee & they welcome any thoughts you may have.

### **Health Care Delivery Advisory Committee**

- 18 member committee charged with setting affordability benchmarks, monitoring healthcare system performance, collaborating with stakeholders to develop & maintain a Statewide Health Care Delivery Strategic Plan, among other things.
- Meeting agendas & minutes can be found [here](#).
- HealthFirst is currently represented by Executive Director [Susan Ridzon](#) & she welcomes your thoughts.



Can you identify this location?



## Support for Practices Participating in Medicare's Quality Payment Program/MIPS

As some of you may know, recent developments in the timing of Vermont's agreements with CMS means that some providers who are not participating in an advanced alternative payment model (APM) will be required to complete Merit Based Incentive Payment System (MIPS) reporting in 2026.

The Blueprint for Health Quality Improvement (QI) Facilitators, along with quality partners at Healthcentric Advisors, will support Patient-Centered Medical Homes (and potentially specialty practices new to MIPS) to understand the MIPS requirements, optimize MIPS performance, and navigate administrative requirements for submission.

As a starting point, facilitators are starting with helping providers in practices understand if they are eligible and what steps to take next. Don't delay – if you're eligible for MIPS, you must report data collected during the calendar year beginning January 1, 2026 to avoid practice reimbursement penalties – up to a 9% reduction in Medicare payments – and to potentially receive positive payment adjustments on Medicare Fee for Service claims for high scores. Contact your QI facilitator for more information.

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## Vermont Practices Take Note: Changes to Vermont State Teachers' Retirement System Health Coverage in 2026

Beginning Jan 1 approximately 7,100 retirees from the Vermont State Teachers' Retirement System (VSTRS) will move to a HealthSpring True Choice (PPO) Group Medicare Advantage Plan. Here's what Vermont clinicians and practices should know:

- HealthSpring plans were previously known as Cigna Medicare plans. Earlier this year, The Cigna Group sold its Medicare business to Health Care Service Corporation (HCSC). As a result of this transaction, Cigna Medicare will become HealthSpring effective January 1, 2026.
- VSTRS retirees are enrolled in a Group-sponsored HealthSpring Medicare Advantage Plan. This is a passive PPO plan, with no network restrictions or referrals required. Members pay the same out of pocket cost share for in-network and out-of-network covered services.
- If you are a Medicare provider, you may treat these members regardless of your contract or network status with HealthSpring. The only requirements are that you agree to see the member as a patient, accept Medicare assignment and submit claims to HealthSpring.

HealthSpring Provider Customer Service is available to help with any questions at 1-800-230-6138, Monday – Friday, 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. CT. Or visit [healthspring.com/providers](https://healthspring.com/providers).



# **Medicare Updates**



## **CMS Telehealth Flexibilities**

The continuing resolution passed by Congress and signed by President Trump extends previous Medicare telehealth flexibilities through January 30, 2026. These include:

- Audio-only non-behavioral telehealth visits
- A patient's home can be the originating site and there are no geographic restrictions for Medicare non-behavioral telehealth visits
- Expanded provider eligibility for general telehealth (i.e., occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech-language pathologists, and audiologists)
- Delayed in-person visit requirements for behavioral telehealth visits

Telehealth flexibilities will apply retroactively as if there hadn't been a temporary lapse in the application of the telehealth flexibilities through Jan 30, 2026. See CMS' recent [FAQ](#) for details.



## **Medicare 2026 Physician Fee Schedule and Quality Payment Program Updates**

The final rule was published on November 5 and includes several noteworthy changes to physician payment and the Quality Payment Program (QPP), including:

- There now are two separate Conversion Factors (CFs):
  - For Qualifying Participants (QPs) in an Advanced Alternative Payment Model (APM), the CF is \$33.5675 – a 3.77% increase from 2025 rate
  - For non-APM providers, the CF is \$33.4009, a 3.26% increase.
- A new efficiency adjustment results in a 2.5% reduction in work RVUs for many non-time-based services (e.g., procedures, imaging, diagnostics, and various non-office-visit services).
- Modifications to the way Medicare calculates and allocates practice-expense (PE) payments that shifts more of the indirect PE costs toward office-based settings relative to facility settings
- Changes to payments deemed wasteful. For example, the final rule changes payment for skin substitutes by treating them as "incident-to" supplies rather than biologics which is estimated to reduce skin substitute spending by nearly 90%.
- Broadly pushes toward value-based care and care management by aligning incentives to reinforce primary and chronic disease care

Overall, the increase in CF may offer some relief to independent providers (especially small & office-based) relative to the cuts seen in recent years. However, the efficiency adjustment and reallocation of practice-expense payments may cause net payment reductions for many procedural, diagnostic, and facility-based services. On the other hand, practices delivering office-based, primary care, chronic disease management, and other non-procedure-heavy services may see more stability - or even relative gains - especially if participating in value-based APMs.

See CMS [fact sheet](#) and specialty impact [table](#) for more information. QPP info [here](#).

# Member Updates & Events

**Update: APP  
Membership Dues  
Increasing in 2026**

The HealthFirst BOD approved an increase of 2026 membership dues for NPs and PAs. Starting in January, the annual membership dues for APPs will be \$500/year (was \$360). There are no other changes to dues.

**JOIN US**



## **Coffee Chats**

Coffee chats are a chance for HealthFirst practice managers and owners to discuss any practice related issues.

**Coffee chats are held the second Tuesday of each month from 12:15 – 12:45 PM via Zoom.**

## **2026 Board Meetings**

The 2026 BOD meetings will be held on Wednesdays from 6:30 – 8:30 PM. Please each out if you would like to join! We will share minutes with members after each meeting.

### 2026 Meeting Dates

January 28  
February 18\*  
March 25  
April 29\*  
May 27  
October 21

\* Potentially Executive Committee only



**Remember!**

Please use our HealthFirst Membership Update Form to notify us of any changes at your practice, such as clinicians leaving or joining, or changes to your address or practice manager.

You can find all membership forms on our website's Resources page here.

