

# HEALTHFIRST HAPPENINGS



VERMONT HEALTHFIRST · MEMBER NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2026

**IN THIS ISSUE:** A full 2026 legislative recap, update on federal rural-health funding, a member spotlight from Burlington, and what's ahead this Fall.



## ***Happy Summer from the HealthFirst Team!***

*The 2026 legislative session is over! It was a very active and sometimes difficult and defensive session as lawmakers worked hard to address Vermont's complex issues. Improving healthcare affordability and access, and support for primary care, were major topics this session. Healthcare is extra challenging right now with federal and state changes, including funding cuts and a shift back to fee-for-service for primary care practices who had become accustomed to more stable capitated payments. Throughout the session, HealthFirst advocated to support our members and reduce unnecessary burdens on practices. We successfully helped prevent legislation that would have imposed additional challenges on providers while also securing funding to support primary care payments. Read our legislative recap for more details!*

*– Susan, Christina and Rick*

## **SAVE THE DATE!**

Saturday, November 7, 2026

HealthFirst Annual Meeting

9 AM–3 PM · Country Club of Vermont in Waterbury

## 2026 LEGISLATIVE RECAP



### SIGNED INTO LAW BY GOV. SCOTT

**H.545 (Act 76)**

SIGNED • MAR 24

#### **Immunization recommendations**

Gives Vermont health officials authority to issue their own vaccine and immunization recommendations, reducing the state's reliance on federal guidance.

**H.84 (Act 80)**

SIGNED • APR 20

#### **Telehealth recording**

Allows telehealth appointments to be recorded with the consent of both the patient and the provider.

**H.237 (Act 84)**

SIGNED • APR 27

#### **Psychologist prescribing**

Establishes prescribing authority for qualified doctoral-level psychologists.

**H.46 (Act 98)**

SIGNED • MAY 18

#### **Rare Disease Advisory Council**

Creates a state advisory council focused on rare-disease care and policy.

**H.814 (Act 101)**

SIGNED • MAY 18

#### **Neurological rights & AI in health/human services**

Protects neurological data rights and sets guardrails for the use of artificial intelligence across health and human services.

**S.313 (Act 177)**

SIGNED • JUNE 18

#### **Banning noncompetes**

Includes language voiding noncompete provisions and protecting providers' ability to inform patients where they will continue practicing.



### ■ SIGNED INTO LAW BY GOV. SCOTT

#### H.588 (Act 119)

SIGNED · JUNE 8

### Pharmacy test-and-treat

Allows pharmacy and pharmacy technicians to test-and-treat for COVID-19, strep, and flu, and allows pharmacists to prescribe, order, or administer medications for the prevention of HIV, including those for pre-exposure and post-exposure prophylaxis.

#### S.209 (Act 150)

SIGNED · JUNE 16

### Prohibiting arrest in sensitive locations

Prohibits civil arrests, including arrests intended to secure someone's attendance at a civil or immigration proceeding, in designated "sensitive locations," including health care facilities.

#### H.951 (Act 144)

SIGNED · JUNE 16

### FY 2027 budget

The FY27 proposed budget included more than \$16 million in cuts to providers, largely due to the end of OneCare and other funding reductions. HealthFirst worked with stakeholders to restore a portion of these cuts, including funding for key workforce programs. The final approved budget includes \$3.7 million (gross) for Medicaid primary care payments administered by the Department of Vermont Health Access (DVHA), \$667,000 for the primary care loan repayment program, and \$50,000 for the MD Placement Program through the Area Health Education Center (AHEC).

#### S.71 (Act 145)

SIGNED · JUNE 16

### Data privacy

Contains a HIPAA-covered entity exemption, including an exemption for health care facilities that comply with HIPAA even if they are not technically HIPAA-covered, such as direct care practices and free clinics. HealthFirst, in coordination with other health care organizations, worked to get these HIPAA and HIPAA-related exemptions included in the bill to ensure our practices are not overburdened with compliance and the associated costs.

#### S.64 (Act 171)

SIGNED · JUNE 18

### Optometrist scope of practice

Creates an Advanced Therapeutic Procedures Specialty, allowing properly trained optometrists to perform specific minor surgical, laser, and injection procedures without needing a medical doctor referral.



## SIGNED INTO LAW BY GOV. SCOTT

**S.197 (Act 173)**

**SIGNED · JUNE 18**

### Primary care payment reform

Begins the process of creating a universal primary care system by directing state agencies and stakeholders to study, design, and recommend implementation options. It also explores shifting care from hospitals to community-based primary care, assesses the feasibility of a regional universal primary care program, and improve coordination among health care agencies. HealthFirst and several of its members testified in support of this bill.

**H.583 (Act 133)**

**SIGNED · JUNE 15**

### Corporate practice of medicine / private-equity (PE) reporting

Establishes new ownership transparency requirements, requiring most health care entities to disclose PE or hedge fund ownership and control information to the Green Mountain Care Board starting in 2027. HealthFirst, and other health care stakeholders, worked to compromise on the bill. Earlier versions would have prohibited several common forms of practice ownership and imposed significant new reporting requirements on providers. Most HealthFirst members need only attest that they have no PE or hedge fund involvement. PE-backed practices face additional reporting requirements. Practices considering investor-backed arrangements (including MSO/"friendly physician" models) should assess compliance with the new restrictions and the Attorney General's enforcement authority. Reporting & attestation procedures have not been specified yet.

## DID NOT REACH FINAL PASSAGE

**S.190**

**VETOED · JUNE 16**

### Reference-based pricing, GMCB oversight & hospital outsourcing

The session's most significant cost-containment bill. It would have fast-tracked a "soft opening" of reference-based pricing — tying certain hospital payments to a Medicare benchmark — starting with Vermont Health Connect (ACA) and school-employee (VEHI) plans, and bring outsourced clinical services under Green Mountain Care Board oversight. It cleared both chambers on near party-line votes, and Governor Scott vetoed the bill citing fairness throughout the insurance marketplace as the primary reason for his veto. In his [veto letter](#), Scott said he intends to use executive action to push forward parts of an insurance reform bill his administration put forward this session (H.585).

**H.585**

**PASSED HOUSE · DID NOT  
PASS SENATE**

### Health insurance reform

Proposed increased state oversight of nonprofit insurers (BCBSVT), expanded access to association health plans (AHP), and site-neutral reimbursement rules to standardize payments for certain outpatient services regardless of setting. HealthFirst testified in support of the AHP & site-neutral reimbursement provisions, and advocated to expand the site-neutral codes to include selected evaluation and management (E/M) services.

# HealthFirst Member Spotlight

ADVANCED PRIMARY CARE · BURLINGTON



*Spencer Blackman, MD*

## Coming back to what matters

A CONVERSATION WITH DR. SPENCER  
BLACKMAN, MD

Ask Dr. Blackman what he enjoys most about being a family physician and the answer comes quickly. He likes getting to know people and caring for them over time. It is a simple thing to say, but it has shaped a career that has stretched across two coasts, through a fast-growing medical group, and now into a practice of his own.

## From Miami to the Bay Area

Dr. Blackman grew up in Miami and stayed close to home for medical school at the University of Miami. He then headed west for his residency at UCSF from 2003 to 2006, followed by a fellowship in faculty development. What came next was a tour through nearly every corner of primary care the Bay Area had to offer including student health, adult primary care, musculoskeletal urgent care, and a stretch as a PCP within an independent practice association. It was a wide range of experiences that would later serve him well in ways he could not have predicted.

In 2009, Dr. Blackman joined One Medical, then a young practice founded by Tom Lee. It was built around an idea that felt genuinely new at the time. For a modest annual membership of \$149, patients got things we now take for granted such as online scheduling, an app to manage appointments and request refills, visits that actually started on time, and clinicians who were supported in staying current.

"It was a progressive model for the time," Dr. Blackman recalls. He grew right along with it, becoming Medical Director first for the Bay Area and then for the entire West Coast. Along the way he built an education department from scratch. The team, led by Dr. Blackman, ran weekly clinical rounds, quizzes, practice assessments, clinical news updates, and a CME conference. When Amazon acquired One Medical, Dr. Blackman became part of Amazon Health, and he kept the work going even after moving to Burlington in 2015, though most of it shifted to a virtual setting. *(Continued on page 8 >>>)*

# Rural Health Transformation Program

TWO NEW FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES FROM AHS

APPLICATIONS DUE

**Fri 7/17**

GRANT CONTACT

**Amber Thomas**

[ahs.contracts@vermont.gov](mailto:ahs.contracts@vermont.gov)

## Shifting Care Outside of Hospitals

There is a new [grant opportunity](#) open to non-hospital and hospital providers. Funds are intended to support the changes necessary to shift care out of the hospitals and into the community such as:

- Development of regional prenatal, birthing, and post-natal care networks, including coordinated referral pathways and wraparound supports.
- Pediatric care redesign to improve timely access, care coordination, and integration.
- Improved access to mental health services, including integration of mental health and co-occurring substance use disorder services.

## Facility Upgrades to Support Regionalization

AHS also is offering [grants](#) of \$50,000 to \$2,000,000 to rural healthcare providers including independent primary care and specialty practices to make minor facility upgrades that support the state's efforts to reorganize where and how care is delivered so services are right-sized and accessible. Eligible improvements include:

- Electrical updates to accommodate specialized equipment or new technology
- Accessibility upgrades
- Reconfiguring office or clinical areas to support shared operations or integrated care
- Repairs and general safety improvements.

Eligible practices must be physically located in a rural Vermont ZIP code.

**Learn more & subscribe:** [healthcarereform.vermont.gov/hr1rural-health-transformation-fund](https://healthcarereform.vermont.gov/hr1rural-health-transformation-fund)

## ArrayRx Drug Discount Card Program

LEARN MORE

Thanks to legislation passed this session championed by State Treasurer Mike Pieciak, Vermont is joining ArrayRx, a multi-state partnership that uses collective buying power to negotiate lower prescription drug prices.

The **free ArrayRx Discount Card** is available to all Vermonters, regardless of age, income, or insurance status. While it is not health insurance, it can help lower the cost of many prescription medications at participating pharmacies. Vermonters can present the ArrayRx Card when filling a prescription to save on medications. The card is expected to be available by January 2027, if not sooner.

# New Members

WELCOME TO HEALTHFIRST!



## NEW PRACTICE

**Advanced Primary Care** — Spencer Blackman, MD



## NEW CLINICIANS

**Judy Gordon, MD** — Thomas Chittenden Health Center

**Molly Heller, NP** — Tamarack Family Medicine

**Emily Waters Duke, PA** — Evergreen Family Health

**Waisim Haidari, MD** — Four Seasons Dermatology

## Events & Education

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

#### Reference-Based Pricing Webinar — Vermont Healthcare 911

[Watch the webinar](#) · [Read the commentary](#)

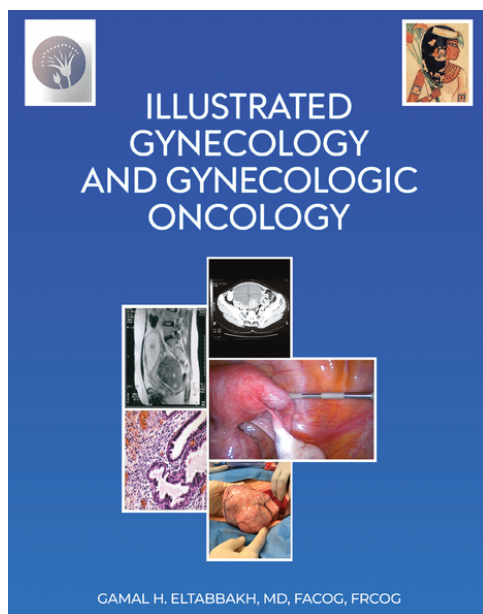
#### Medical Aid in Dying (MAID) Webinar

For members who want to understand the clinical and legal landscape in VT

[Watch the webinar \(link for members only.\)](#)

## New Medical Textbook

Retired HealthFirst member **Gamal Eltabbakh, MD** recently published the first gynecology textbook by a Vermont physician!



**Illustrated Gynecology and Gynecologic Oncology** is a comprehensive highly visual reference designed for medical students, residents, midlevel providers, practicing gynecologists, gynecologic oncology fellows, practicing gynecologic oncologists, primary care physicians, nurses and clinicians involved in women's health care. Clear, concise, and exceptionally accessible, this textbook delivers up-to-date guidance across the full spectrum of gynecologic and gynecologic oncology care.

Featuring more than 650 original, full-color illustrations—including surgical photographs, clinical images, CT, ultrasound, MRI, and X-ray scans, pathology slides, and anatomical diagrams—this book transforms complex concepts into practical, easy-to-understand information. Each image has been carefully selected from the author's 40-year career, providing rare real-world insight into both common and challenging clinical scenarios.

## Putting Down Roots in Vermont

While continuing his remote One Medical work, Dr. Blackman picked up more patient-facing roles back in Vermont. This included eight years with UVM's South Burlington Family Practice and three years as a HealthFirst member at Champlain Medical Urgent Care, where he handles employee wellness and immigration exams. But something kept tugging at him. As rewarding as the leadership work at One Medical had been, it was steering his career toward operations and management, and away from the exam room and the local community and patient collaborations he loved.

***"If I stayed with One Medical, my career would be more focused on operations and leadership — and I longed to get back to working around people and directly with patients."*** — DR. SPENCER BLACKMAN

So when someone suggested he open a direct care practice, Dr. Blackman sat with the idea for a while and eventually took the leap and opened Advanced Primary Care in April 2026.

## Advanced Primary Care

Today, Advanced Primary Care offers broad, relationship-based primary care with pricing set by age so that it welcomes everyone from patients in their twenties and thirties to older adults managing chronic conditions. Dr. Blackman brings particular depth in cardiovascular disease prevention/ heart health, mental health care including depression, anxiety, and ADHD, and musculoskeletal care, including joint injections.

What excites him right now is simple and human. He wants to get to know more people in the community and care for them over the long haul. His goal for the next two years is a sustainable practice. Five years out is less certain. He might add another clinician to help the practice grow and to support local small businesses, but he is comfortable letting that part unfold.

He is honest about the challenges of building something new, too. There is the question of arranging coverage when he is away, and the real work of learning how to be there for his patients to the standard he holds himself to while still finding time for his family and avocations. And like any new practice owner, he hopes to welcome enough patients to keep the doors open for the long run.

It is a candid take from a physician who has thought hard about what he wants the rest of his career to look like and decided to spend it doing the part he loves most.

Please join us in welcoming Dr. Blackman and Advanced Primary Care to HealthFirst!  
Learn more: [apcmedicine.com](https://apcmedicine.com)

Want to be featured in a future spotlight? Email Susan at [sr@vermonthealthfirst.org](mailto:sr@vermonthealthfirst.org)

# In the News

## MEMBERS & VERMONT HEALTH CARE



VERMONT PUBLIC • APR 21

### **For a fee, the doctor will see you now**

About 20% of HealthFirst practices now run concierge or direct primary care models — easing burnout while raising questions about access. Story features HealthFirst member Sara Headley.

VTDIGGER • APR 21

### **Northwestern Medical Center moves to preserve birthing services**

Facing the strain birthing services place on rural hospitals, NMC has formed a partnership with HealthFirst BOD member Dr. Jennie Lowell's practice to keep local labor and delivery care available.

VERMONT PUBLIC • APR 28

### **Strafford residents barter for a free vasectomy**

An only-in-Vermont story: a HealthFirst urologist, Dr. Mike Curtis, donated a procedure to a Lions Club raffle, secured by an uninsured family with a box of farm-raised beef.

VTDIGGER • MAY 3

### **AI is quietly reshaping how Vermont's doctors care for patients**

Clinicians are increasingly using AI tools, with advocates pointing to lighter documentation and reduced burnout. Rick Dooley was interviewed for this story.

VTDIGGER • MAY 18

### **Vermont rejected federal vaccine rollbacks — but doctors still feel the impact**

Even after declining federal policy changes, clinicians say a fresh wave of vaccine skepticism is straining the primary care workforce. HealthFirst pediatrician, Dr. Joe Nasca quoted.

VTDIGGER • MAY 21

### **Hospitals need to cut spending drastically — but do their plans deliver?**

AHS is steering hospitals toward efficiency and shared services, but VTDigger finds the plans light on specifics about dollars spent and saved.

VERMONT PUBLIC • JUN 11

### **Regulators approve a new surgery center for the Upper Valley**

The Green Mountain Care Board unanimously approved a freestanding multi-specialty surgery center in Hartford that could open as soon as next year. The project is spearheaded by Dr. Mike Curtis.

# Quality & Practice Support

NO-COST · ENROLL NOW

An open, time-limited window to join the CMS Northeast Quality Innovation Network–Quality Improvement Organization (QIN-QIO), delivered locally by Healthcentric Advisors with IPRO. Free, flexible, and tailored to your priorities — unenroll any time.

## What you get

- MIPS quality reporting (with Blueprint for Health)
- Billing, EHR optimization, and workflow efficiency
- Peer learning across a 16-state network
- Care coordination & behavioral health integration
- Data reports and subject-matter experts

The new program cycle is underway and enrollment is time-sensitive — the sooner you join, the sooner the team can tailor support to your practice.

**Enroll:** [the QIN-QIO sign-up form](#)

**Program home:** [qi.ipro.org](http://qi.ipro.org)



Questions?

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## HealthSpring (Cigna Medicare)

As of Jan. 1, 2026, Cigna Medicare became HealthSpring, and you may have begun seeing HealthSpring Medicare Advantage members in your practice. HealthSpring is part of Health Care Service Corporation, the country's largest customer-owned health insurer. You can find information at [HealthSpring.com/Providers](https://HealthSpring.com/Providers).

If you accept Medicare, you may see HealthSpring Medicare Advantage PPO members without a referral, even if you don't participate in HealthSpring networks. The only requirements are that you agree to see the member as a patient, accept Medicare and submit their claims to HealthSpring.

PPO members covered through HealthSpring Medicare Advantage employer groups, including the Vermont State Teachers' Retirement System (VSTRS) and Vermont State Colleges, pay the same out-of-pocket costs for covered in-network and out-of-network services. To identify these members, look for the "PPO" plan type at the top of their HealthSpring member ID card, along with their employer name. Learn more about PPOs with [HealthSpring](#).

# From Our Community

MEMBERS, TOGETHER



## Stay Connected

MEMBER LOGISTICS



### BOARD MEETINGS

**Remaining in 2026**

**Sep 16 • Oct 21**

All members are welcome — reach out to join. Minutes are shared after each meeting.

### COFFEE CHATS

**Managers & Owners**

**2nd Tues • Monthly**

An informal space to talk through practice issues. 12:15–12:45 PM via Zoom.

### KEEP US POSTED

**Practice Update Form**

**[vermonthealthfirst.org](https://vermonthealthfirst.org)**

Tell us about clinicians joining or leaving, a new address, or a new practice manager.

SAVE THE DATE

## HealthFirst Annual Meeting

**Saturday, November 7, 2026 • 9 AM–3 PM**



Watch for registration details and the agenda in the coming months.



MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR BENEFITS

### **HR support from Triumph HR**

Reilly DiPlacido • Founder & CEO, Triumph HR. Included with your membership — reach out: [REDACTED]

