

ANNUAL REPORT 2023



Free Medical Care & Health Services for Vermonters in Need

Table of Contents

Nine Clinics Across Vermont BURLINGTON BARRE MIDDLEBURY RANDOLPH WHITE RIVER JUNCTION RUTLAND WINDSOR SPRINGFIELD BENNINGTON

BARRE

People's Health and Wellness Clinic

Medical and Dental Services 553 North Main Street, Barre, VT 05641

BENNINGTON

Dr. G. Richard Dundas Free Clinic

Medical Services

121 Depot Street, Bennington, VT 05201

BURLINGTON

Health Assistance Program at UVM Health Network

Referral Services Only

128 Lakeside Avenue, Suite 106, Burlington, VT 05401

MIDDLEBURRY

Open Door Clinic

Medical and Dental Services 100 Porter Drive, Middlebury, VT 05753

RANDOLPH

Health Connections at Gifford

Referral Services Only 44 South Main Street, Randolph, VT 05060

RUTLAND

Rutland County Health Partners, formerly Rutland County Free Clinic

Medical and Dental Services 204 North Main Street Rutland, VT

SPRINGFIELD

Valley Health Connections

Referral Services Only

268 River Street, Springfield, VT 05156

WHITE RIVER JCT

Good Neighbor Health Clinic and Red Logan Dental

Medical and Dental Services

70 North Main St, White River Jct, VT 05001

WINDSOR

Mount Ascutney Health Connections

Referral Services Only

289 County Road, Windsor, VT 05089

Welcome!

Free Medical Care & Health Services for Vermonters in Need

Dear Reader,

Vermont's Free & Referral Clinics (VFRC) is a coalition of nine clinics whose mission is to serve Vermonters in need. What began in 1995 as The Vermont Coalition for the Uninsured, VFRC has grown into a well-connected, impactful organization that is a crucial resource for many Vermont communities. All of the patient care our clinics provide is always free.

As you browse through this report, we hope you'll notice the many community collaborations and valuable partnerships we've established to deliver care to more people in need. Despite limited resources, our clinic teams and hundreds of volunteers work steadfastly to address the complexities of health in our communities.

In 2023, VFRC received an impressive 40% increase in legislative grant funding. This increase allowed us to address the needs of thousands of Vermonters during a challenging year of extreme flooding, rising costs, and the end of pandemic-era medical programs.

Our progress would not be possible without the support of our incredible volunteers and partnerships. Thank you.

Olivia Sharrow

VFRC Executive Director

Daniel Barlow
VFRC Board Chair



Our team at the Vermont Statehouse in March, 2023. For every dollar invested by the Vermont legislature, our clinics save Vermont \$9.70.

VFRC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Olivia Sharrow, MPH Executive Director

CLINIC LEADERS / BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Elizabeth Austin, MHA Good Neighbor Health Clinic

Samantha Ball, MBA Valley Health Connections

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> Michele Packard Health Connections at Gifford Medical Center

Tia Poalino - Treasurer
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formerly Rutland County Free Clinic

Kelli Rapp

Mount Ascutney Health Connections
at Mount Ascutney Hospital

Renee Ross (interim)
Health Assistance Program
at the UVM Health Network

Heidi Sulis, MPH - Vice Chair Open Door Clinic

Our Mission

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.

125 Tremont St. | Barre, VT 05641 802-448-4280 | vtfreeclinics.org

Our Impact

Vermont's Free & Referral Clinics are like Vermont itself - small but mighty. The positive impact we have on healthcare in Vermont is tremendous (see column) and our services are always free for patients.

Each clinic is an independent organization that uniquely serves its community. We have two models for care delivery.

Free-standing clinics provide a range of medical, dental, and mental health services on-site, as well as case management, insurance navigation, financial assistance, and referrals to specialty services.

Referral clinics provide case management, insurance navigation, financial assistance, and care coordination within their hospital's system.



Clinic leaders exhibit at the Statehouse in Montpelier.



Running for a cause. Community members and clinic staff brave the cold for a successful Fun Run fundraiser last winter.

In 2023, VFRC Clinics served:

13,477 INDIVIDUAL PATIENTS

a 17% increase over 2022

VERMONTERS IN

TOWNS ACROSS THE STATE

= **94%**of Vermont's
municipalities

VFRC Clinics provided:

\$6.6 million

OF FREE MEDICATION

\$790,000

HOSPITAL FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

\$152,022

OF FREE PRESCRIPTION EYEGLASSES, DENTURES AND MEDICAL EQUIPMENT

\$615,068

OF DONATED VOLUNTEER TIME

The value of these services in avoided Emergency Room and hospitalization charges is an estimated \$7.9 million.

- Olivia Sharrow, Executive Director

Referral Clinics - Connecting Patients to Care

BURLINGTON

66 A lifeline when I needed it most. 99

Health Assistance Program (HAP) at the University of Vermont Health Network

The Health Assistance Program at the UVM Health Network enhances the lives of thousands of Vermonters each year by assisting them with access to the health resources they need. We're a busy office located in Burlington. Focused on delivering a positive experience for each patient, we often receive feedback from patients that HAP provided them a lifeline when they needed it most.

What do we provide?

- The gift of sight: Income-qualified Vermonters may be eligible for an eye exam and a pair of prescription glasses.
- **Medication discounts:** HAP is a prescription co-pay assistance program that helps with out-of-pocket costs of prescriptions which can be picked up at UVM Health Network pharmacies or mailed to a patient's home.
- Insurance enrollment & navigation: We assist individuals
 in getting signed up for insurance (which is required) and
 enrollment in other State and Federal programs.

- Access to durable medical equipment: HAP may provide limited financial support for medical equipment.
- **Connections to care:** We connect patients to hospital programs with free or reduced-cost healthcare, and other community resources.

How do patients hear about us?

- · Referrals from UVM Health Network doctors and staff.
- Recommendations from Community Health Centers.
- · Age Well's healthcare advocacy work.
- Outreach through healthcare fairs and community events by our staff.

Please reach out to HAP for more information. We're here to help Vermonters in need. 1-888-739-5183

▲ Visit their website

RANDOLPH

We meet patients where they are. >>

- Michele Packard

Health Connections at Gifford

The Health Connections program is a referral clinic residing within Gifford. In 2023 we served 638 patients, 162 of whom were new to the program.

Across Gifford, providers and staff are committed to meeting patients where they are, connecting with individuals in a way that's effective for them. This strategy extends to the Health Connections program led by Michele Packard.

On behalf of individuals facing a variety of challenges, Health Connections navigates the complexities of insurance through Vermont Health Connect, Medicare, and financial assistance through various Charitable Care programs, to assist with access and affordability of healthcare. Those complexities are frequently challenging and overwhelming for patients to navigate on their own.

"A recent patient believed she was losing Medicare and Medicaid, but we confirmed Medicare was not ending," Michele shares. "Several of us were involved, including Gifford's Community Health Team and individuals at the State level, and it took time to straighten out, but we got her back on the program that she'd been removed from. It took really staying on it."

In addition to advocating for patients to assist with affordability and access, Health Connections collaborates with Gifford providers, staff and the Community Health Team to help patients address other issues in their lives that affect overall health and wellbeing, like medication affordability, food insecurity, housing and transportation.

Visit their website >

SPRINGFIELD

Our approach involves educating our patients. **

- Samantha Ball

Valley Health Connections

2023 underscored the ever-increasing need for referral clinic services in the Springfield area, and in Windham and Windsor counties as a whole.

Significant hardships are driving the growing demand for our services - poverty, housing shortages, mental health issues, addiction, lack of healthcare, land language barriers.

Comprehensive Support: Recognizing how healthcare intersects with many other aspects of life, we strive to serve the whole person and address their multifaceted needs when possible. We offer health insurance enrollment assistance, financial aid programs, pharmacy and dental assistance, and referrals to providers.

Patient Empowerment: Our approach involves educating patients, creating individualized plans and alleviating shame associated with not understanding the system. Empowering patients to have agency in their health has a long-lasting, positive impact.

Partnerships and Collaborations: Working together enables us to provide more coordinated care, resources, and a better patient experience. We value our connections to:

- · Vermont State Healthcare Advocates
- · Senior Solutions in Springfield
- · Springfield Hospital
- North Star Health

Our local food co-op was also a big help this year. They told many people in need about our services, and even created a "round up for change" to help sustain our efforts.

Despite the challenges of operating out of a very small space, we are dedicated to supporting Vermont's marginalized populations, ensuring they receive the information and care they deserve.

Visit their website

WINDSOR

66 Hope is at the heart of our clinic. **

- Kelli Rapp

Mt. Ascutney Health Connections

Embedded in the Mt. Ascutney Hospital in Windsor, Mt. Ascutney Health Connections is a vital connection point for many in our rural community.

What hardships are people here facing?

- · Absence of primary care providers
- Serious financial stress
- · Addiction and mental health struggles
- · Loss of benefits due to the Medicaid unwind

How do we help?

- Insurance Enrollment Assistance
- Medication Access: We assist in getting medications at free or reduced costs.
- Dental Assistance: We direct people to dentists who accept Medicaid and, when able, assist financially.
- Crisis Support: As part of the hospital, we're able to provide insurance assistance for people in crisis who are uninsured and need mental health support.
- Transportation: Gas cards and transportation vouchers for patients to get to medical appointments.

- Disability Benefits: We help people with disabilities navigate the complex process of obtaining benefits.
- Financial Assistance & Healthcare Resources

Community connections

We truly value the important connections we have with:

- Mount Ascutney Hospital and Health Center
- Connecticut Valley Addiction Recovery
- · Health Care and Rehabilitation Services of Vermont/HCRS
- Volunteers in Action
- · Ottauquechee Health Foundation

Hope

Hope is at the heart of our clinic! Patients often express that they feel relieved and hopeful knowing there is someone here for them. We are dedicated and will continue to work to provide critical support and vital services to those in need.

Visit their website Mt. Ascutney Hospital and Health Center
Dartmouth-Hitchcock

The Importance of Our Volunteers

Hundreds of volunteer medical professionals donate their time to serve our patients

Since 1995, our free clinics have been able to provide high quality, professional patient care and services due to the unwavering commitment of our network of volunteers. Hundreds of retired medical professionals, current medical students, practicing doctors and nurses, and non-medical volunteers choose to generously donate their time and expertise to serve Vermonters in need. Their dedication is what makes this work possible.

Whether providing direct patient care in a clinic setting or on an outreach team, our medical volunteers focus on the whole person, providing in the moment care and solutions for moving forward with improved health. Our non-clinical volunteers provide other crucial work within the clinic, working alongside staff to assist with administrative tasks and more.

These volunteer partnerships embody our community-driven approach to healthcare and the collaborative spirit needed to do our best for people in need.

Thank you, volunteers!



Clinics partner with local hospitals, colleges, and universities to harness the energy of volunteers.





We could not do what we do without the passion and dedication of our volunteers.

Number of Volunteers vs Paid Staff 7,715 hours Volunteers 3,415 GENERAL VOLUNTEERS 4,300 CLINICIAN HOURS

PAID STAFF

Free Clinics - Partnering with Communities, Caring for Patients

BARRE

People's Health & Wellness Clinic

As we reflect on 2023, we are filled with pride and gratitude for the impact the People's Health & Wellness Clinic (PHWC) has made in our community. The year was one of significant achievements, new initiatives, and strengthened partnerships, all aimed at improving the health and well-being of our patients. Despite the challenges facing free clinics in Vermont, we have risen to the occasion, thanks to the unwavering support of our community, volunteers, and staff.

Record Number of Patients Served

In 2023, PHWC treated nearly 600 patients, marking a 20% increase from the previous year. This surge is largely attributed to the Medicaid unwind, which left many without coverage and seeking services. Our dedicated team worked tirelessly to ensure that each patient received the highest quality care, despite the increased demand. This growth underscores the essential role that PHWC plays, especially as accessibility remains a critical issue.

Successful Fundraising Initiatives

Fundraising is crucial to sustaining our operations and expanding services. This year we brought back the clinic's popular Bowlathon fundraiser. The event was a tremendous success, raising \$8,000. Funds raised directly support our mission to provide free, high-quality healthcare to the underserved. We are grateful to everyone who participated in making this event a success.



Bowling for a cause. The team from Vermont Works for Women celebrates a win at PHWC's Bowlathon fundraiser.

Fundraising is crucial to sustaining our operations. >>

- Dan Barlow

Expanding Oral Healthcare Services

An exciting recent development is the expansion of our oral healthcare program. Recognizing the urgent need for comprehensive dental services, we began fundraising efforts to include tooth extractions. Thanks to the generosity of our donors, we are thrilled to announce that this service was officially launched in May 2024. Access to dental care is a vital component of overall health.

Strengthening Community Partnerships

Collaboration with local organizations is a cornerstone of our strategy to extend our impact. In 2023, we launched several new partnerships:

- LGBTQ+ Friendly Clinics: In collaboration with the Rainbow Bridge Community Center, we held clinics specifically designed to be welcoming and affirming for the LGBTQ+ community, providing a safe space for individuals to receive care without fear of discrimination.
- Health Clinics for Sex Workers: Partnering with the Ishtar Collective, we organized health clinics tailored to the needs of sex workers, offering compassionate, nonjudgmental care.
- Off-Site Clinics: We established regular off-site clinics at a local motel housing the unhoused and at the Montpelier food shelf in cooperation with Just Basics. These clinics brought essential healthcare directly to those who might otherwise face barriers to access.

Looking Ahead

As we celebrate our achievements, we remain acutely aware of the challenges ahead. The demand for free clinic services continues to grow, and securing sustainable funding is a constant concern. However, our commitment to our mission is unwavering. We'll continue to advocate for healthcare access for all, leveraging our community's strengths and resources to meet the needs of our patients.

Visit their website

BENNINGTON

We support other agencies when the larger system is overwhelmed. - Natalie Basil

Dr. G. Richard Dundas Free Clinic at Greater Bennington Community Services

Located in the heart of Bennington, Greater Bennington Community Services (GBCS) has been providing co-located free medical care, food shelf services, and emergency financial assistance to Vermonters in need since 2017. Although our organization has been in existence for 50 years, the co-location of our programs 5 years ago established us as a hub for our most vulnerable neighbors.

Our free clinic hosts five to six medical clinics per month, with both day and evening hours. Staffed by our dedicated volunteer doctors and nurses, patients are given high-quality care and are never rushed through. Our welcoming environment is a comfort to community members and patients.

Small and Nimble

GBCS is nimble and able to step in to support the hospital, other clinics, and community agencies when the larger system is overwhelmed. We're highly collaborative and continue to evolve to meet the changing needs of the community.

Over the past two years, many local primary care providers have closed their practices, creating long wait lists (up to 18 months) for patients to access care. GBCS helps by providing care including medication refills until patients can reconnect with their primary care providers. Providing healthcare access for anyone in need is a central part of our mission.

Partnerships

Community Street Team -

In early 2024 we joined an outreach team in collaboration with Turning Point, United Counseling Services, and Bennington County Coalition for the Homeless. This innovative program brings services directly to people struggling with chronic homelessness, housing insecurity and health concerns including substance use and mental health challenges. GBCS is able to provide the outreach nurse for this important initiative.



Organizing donated foods in the Kitchen Cupboard.



Remote Area Medical begins to set up for a busy day of providing free patient care.

Remote Area Medical -

Deep concern over the lack of dental and vision services in our region inspired us to build a partnership with a national organization, Remote Area Medical (RAM) to host an annual weekend clinic offering free medical, dental, and vision services. RAM provides 30 volunteers and staff to run the clinic, while GBCS does all the pre-planning and logistics (venue, housing, meals, volunteer recruitment, publicity and more). Our 2023 RAM clinic was a wonderful success, serving nearly 200 people!

Volunteers -

GBCS is fortunate to have 12 dedicated volunteer doctors and 3 volunteer nurses providing patient care at our clinic. We've also benefited from a great collaboration with Williams College whose public health program refers several interns each semester to shadow and provide basic care at our clinics. This gives a group of young adults a glimpse at the skills needed and the need for community health programs.

GBCS could not do our work without the incredible commitment of our volunteers!

Town Support -

We are grateful for the funding we receive from the towns of Bennington, Shaftsbury and Pownal each year as part of town budgets. Our line item on the budget is voted on each year by residents, and has passed with overwhelming support. This recognition helps raise our profile among residents and lets everyone know that we're here. We use these funds to help pay for X-rays, lab work and other medical costs for patients referred to the hospital for further care.

GBCS is committed to serving the Bennington community with compassion and dedication, ensuring that everyone has access to the care they need.

▲ Visit their website

MIDDLEBURY

Open Door Clinic

A patient story...

Staff and Volunteers Come Together to Save a Life

Though only in her early twenties, Luz contacted the Open Door Clinic for urgent cardiovascular care after moving to Vermont. She had arrived just months earlier from Central America to another state, where, remarkably, she had delivered a healthy baby boy despite being in acute heart failure.

Immediate Action

Arriving in Addison County with her infant son in August 2023, Luz needed a double valve replacement. Our bilingual Clinical Director immediately connected her with UVMMC Cardiology. Working with a volunteer medical interpreter, one of our volunteer physicians at ODC coordinated with UVMMC Cardiology and Cardiothoracic Surgery to share Luz's complex history and develop a care plan.

Coordinating Care and Financial Aid

Our Patient Services Coordinator worked with Luz to schedule appointments and prepare a financial aid application for UVMMC, enabling her to access the extensive care she needed at low or no cost. Dr. Grace followed Luz's case, meeting her by phone and during clinics to help her prepare for the upcoming surgery and lifelong care implications it would entail.

Dental Clearance

Luz's surgery required dental clearance. Our Dental Coordinator worked to line up her treatment, and our dental hygienist, extern, and dental assistant treated and improved Luz's overall dental health over the course of multiple visits to minimize infection risk and clear her for surgery.



ODC visiting a local orchard.

Translation and Family Support

Our Communications Coordinator translated pre- and postoperative care information from Luz's cardiothoracic team, and interpreted appointments. She also prepared a letter of support for a travel visa application for Luz's parents, who wanted to come support Luz, since she would be unable to lift her son for months after surgery.

Successful Surgery

In January, Luz underwent successful surgery for the placement of two mechanical heart valves. With a long wait for a primary care provider in Burlington, ODC remained her primary care home during her recovery, providing medication and case management and speaking with nurses. Our provider visited Luz 2–3 times each week, coordinating labs, medications, and even driving her to her weekly lab visits.

A Positive Outcome

By May 2024, Luz was expected to live a normal life and could lift her son again. This outcome would not have been possible without many caring professionals coming together for Luz. This extraordinary example of wraparound care involved 9 ODC staff members, 6 volunteer medical providers and interpreters, over 48 patient interactions, and dozens of home visits and rides from our provider.

Visit their website



ODC's medical services on the go.

Rutland County Health Partners - formerly Rutland County Free Clinic

As we work to fill the gaps of various healthcare services, we are especially thankful for the many partnerships and programs underway at our clinic. Working alongside other community organizations, and powered by the great skill and dedication of our volunteer practitioners, we are able to bring hope to many adults in our community.

Partnerships and Collaborations:

Homeless Healthcare Outreach Team

A small inter-agency team providing field services which include, first aid, mental health, substance use disorder and essential care support. This initiative enables an effective mode of care to homeless individuals in Rutland City.

Community-Based Care Initiative

For several years the Free Clinic has offered health screening & immunization opportunities to towns throughout Rutland County. Adults receive real-time care right within their community. These events provide the resources and supplies that promote self-care as well as referrals to follow up care when necessary.

Volunteer Professionals

Our clinic relies heavily on professional medical and nonmedical local volunteers who generously donate their time and expertise. Without their commitment, we would simply not be able to provide the care that our patients need and deserve.



Working together to serve patients. L-R: Alex Lucci (Turning Point), David Carlson (RC Health Partners), Candice Raines, EMT (Medical Reserve Corps.), Angela French (Rutland Mental Health), Commander Matt Proudy (RCPD).

Medical Reserve Corps

Being able to call on the Vermont State Medical Reserve Corps is extremely helpful. This is a network of clinical and nonclinical volunteers who support emergency response teams across Vermont. These volunteers supplement our clinical support staff during times of volunteer shortages and make special initiatives like homeless healthcare possible.

Coming Soon: Mobile Health Initiative

Grant-funded mobile health services will soon be bringing free healthcare directly to our community, by providing medical assistance and supplies via a mobile unit! The new program will establish a schedule of healthcare services throughout Rutland County. Another way to reduce barriers to care for our rural, underserved adults.

Big News! We Moved!

In 2023 our clinic relocated to a larger, safer, more visible and accessible location (on Route 7). This move is within yards of public transportation. It provides improved handicap access and our patients report a greater sense of safety. Though our operating costs have increased, the move has had a very positive impact.

Fighting Stigma and Building Support

Despite the vital services that we bring, there is an unnecessary stigma surrounding free clinics. It's crucial to communicate to the public the essential role we play in keeping the community healthy and thriving. Park Street Healthshare has been a cornerstone of the community for over 25 years, and we are calling on local businesses to recognize the clinic's value and support our mission through corporate donations and community sponsorships.

Through partnerships, we can make a significant impact on our community's well-being. Please reach out to the clinic if you'd like to become a supporter!

Visit their website

WHITE RIVER JUNCTION

Good Neighbor is here for you.

- Elizabeth Austin

Good Neighbor Health Clinic & Red Logan Dental

Situated in the town of White River Junction, near the New Hampshire border, our clinic is hard at work keeping patient care our highest priority. As we work to expand our reach into our local community and beyond, and as patient numbers and complexity of needs rise, we are fully committed to treating each and every patient with dignity and respect.

In the spring of 2023, we welcomed the addition of Elizabeth Austin as our new Executive Director. Elizabeth is working closely with staff, volunteers, and our board of trustees to develop connections with other social service agencies, local hospitals, community groups and more, to increase awareness of what we do.

Enhancing Our Connections:

In the past year, GNHC grew strong relationships with harm reduction service providers, Wise, The Haven, and several senior centers in our the region to create more options for people in need of care beyond health. Creating partnerships with Hannaford and other local resources, GNHC was able to open a small food pantry. Through the generosity of our community, we were able to create donation days for clothing drives. This has brought together our "Community Corner" where those in need can access clean, lightly used items for free.

Community Presentations:

GNHC presents to community groups to raise awareness of our availability and services. By informing the community about our capabilities, we can reduce unnecessary ER visits and provide accessible healthcare, dental care and services to those in need.

Adopt a Town Program:

GNHC board members distribute flyers and materials about the clinic to surrounding towns. By placing information at food shelves, in laundromats and at social service agencies, we ensure that our resources reach the populations we serve. Our board plays an active role in community engagement



Quality patient care is top priority. Our volunteers make this all possible.



The Good Neighbor team in our new food pantry.

Hospital Outreach:

We've been meeting with ER discharge professionals at nearby hospitals to explain how our clinic can serve specific needs. Many non-urgent patients in the ER could be served by our clinic instead, thus reducing ER costs.

Red Logan Dental:

Red Logan is part of GNHC, and offers free dental care to patients over 18. This partnership allows us to extend our services into oral health, increasing dental access, general wellbeing, and health equity.

Dartmouth College:

Dartmouth public health interns gain clinical experience by volunteering at our clinic. This not only supports our patients but enriches the students' education through real-life experience.

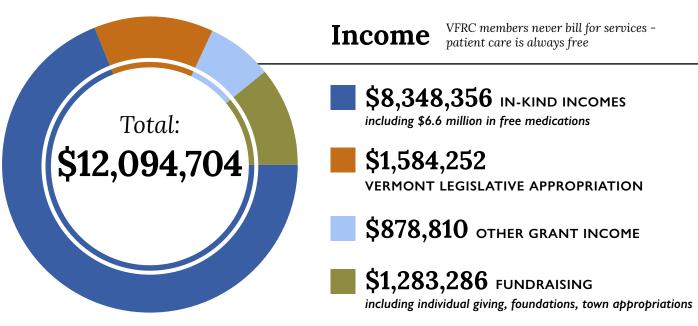
Volunteers:

This year we were assisted by 121 clinical and community volunteers with a total service of 2525 hours! Our work would not be possible without their dedication and deep belief in a thriving community. Creating a safe, quality patient experience has been the priority of GNHC since inception – our volunteers make that happen.

Despite the vital services we provide, many patients still find it difficult to ask for help; there is an element of shame that can hold people back. We wish to communicate to anyone in need – we are here for you, and your health and wellness are very important to us.

* Visit their website*

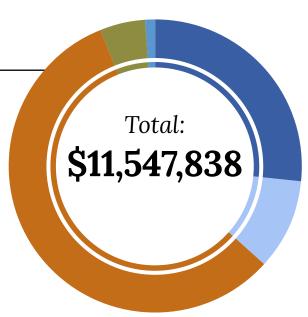
2023 Finances







- \$1,179,051 CLINIC PROGRAMS
- \$6,600,000 FREE MEDICATIONS
- \$576,207 PATIENT FUND, MEDICAL SUPPLIES AND EQUIPMENT
- \$108,940 VFRC OPERATING BUDGET



"No other entity in Vermont provides the comprehensive patient care we provide for the cost at which we do it."

- TIA POALINO, RUTLAND COUNTY HEALTH PARTNERS

FOR EVERY DOLLAR INVESTED

by the VT legislature, our clinics SAVE VT \$9.70