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BI-STATE AND MEMBERS TESTIFY, THEN HOST VT LEGISLATORS RECEPTION



Speaker of the House, Shap Smith (3rd from left,) meets with Bi-State staff and members to talk about Community Health Centers at the State House.

Montpelier, VT - On Feb. 9, the Nonprofit Day at the State House, Bi-State Primary Care Association was the first to testify in front of the House Health Care Committee chaired by Rep. Michael Fisher. Susan Barrett, VT Public Policy Director, distributed Bi-State's VT Primary Care Sourcebook to the Committee members and introduced other speakers. Joshua Plavin, MD, Medical Director of Gifford Health Center spoke to the Committee about the importance of the State Loan Repayment Program as an incentive when trying to recruit primary care physicians to

practice in Vermont. The Committee also heard an update from a Bristol community group, the Five Town Alliance, seeking to establish a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) "Look-Alike" to serve five surrounding towns. Bi-State members provide primary care to 1 in 4 Vermonters, 167,000 people, and are an essential part of the health care delivery system.

Susan Barrett led the testimony in front of the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare. She described the unique model of care employed by Vermont's 8 Federally Qualified Health Centers that enables them to provide primary medical, dental, and behavioral health care - and the overlooked but often necessary enabling services such as transportation to appointments, interpretation, and chronic disease management. Grant Whitmer, CEO of Community Health Centers of the Rutland Region, described how FQHC's weekend and evening hours help reduce costs to the health care system by serving patients that would otherwise seek care at hospital emergency rooms for non-emergent care.



Governor Peter Shumlin poses with Susan Barrett (L) and Tess Stack Kuenning from Bi-State, at the VT Legislators Reception hosted by Bi-State and its Vermont members.

The group met with Speaker of the House, Shap Smith. Bi-State staff, including Executive Director Tess Stack Kuenning, and directors and board members from the Community Health Centers of the Lamoille Valley, The Health Center, Springfield Medical Care Systems, VT Coalition of Clinics for the Uninsured, and Northern Tier Center for Health provided a brief overview of services and programs, including telemedicine, offered at the Community Health Centers. Speaker Smith said, "[Community Health Centers are] the way health care in Vermont needs to go and we will support you in this effort."

The group met with Vermont's Director of Health Care Reform, Robin Lunge, with whom they discussed the integral role of Community Health Centers in providing affordable, high quality access to primary care for Vermonters. Ms. Lunge expressed that "primary care should be redefined within the new health care exchange plans to focus on health prevention and promotion" (the Community Health Center model of care) and should be "less about taking care of disease."

Bi-State members met with their local legislators over lunch and were in attendance for the Legislators Reception held in the State House Cafeteria from 2:00-4:00 PM. Governor Peter Shumlin, the Commissioner of

Health Dr. Harry Chen, and about 75 legislators attended. The Governor said, "You do great work. We will do everything we can to support [the Community Health Centers]."

Bi-State released the first edition of the *Vermont Primary Care Sourcebook*, a compilation of maps, data, and information that provides facts about Federally Qualified Health Centers and other safety-net providers, the patients and communities they serve, and how their cost-effective model of care works. The VT Sourcebook is available on Bi-State's website: www.bistatepca.org.

Established in 1986, Bi-State Primary Care Association, serving Vermont and New Hampshire, is a nonpartisan, nonprofit 501(c) 3 charitable organization that promotes access to effective and affordable primary care and preventive services for all, with special emphasis on underserved populations in New Hampshire and Vermont.

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