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DELIVERY OF PRIMARY CARE MODEL ALREADY IN PRACTICE

MONTPELIER, VT -- CEOs, medical directors, and clinicians from Vermont's eight Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) met with U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders recently to discuss the expansion of primary health care access that will be enabled by passage of the federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (health care reform). Vermont's eight FQHCs, with forty-one sites statewide, currently provide primary care services to over 100,000 residents; nearly one-fifth of all Vermonters - a number expected to grow considerably.

Widespread support for the health center model is the result of decades of data tracking and reporting on costs and health outcomes. The quality of the clinical care and cost efficiencies gained through an integrated, patient-centered system saves an average of 30% per patient on Medicaid. The accessibility and affordability make it possible for everyone to have a medical home, regardless of insurance status or ability to pay. FQHCs accept commercial insurance, Medicaid and Medicare, and offer a sliding scale based on income for those ineligible for other programs. "Federally Qualified Health Centers could serve as a model for health care delivery across America," Senator Sanders said to those gathered in his office in Burlington.

The integrated model of care at FQHCs includes medical, dental, and behavioral health services. Patient-care managers coordinate appointments and help patients navigate the system. As a result of careful case management, FQHCs report favorable patient health outcomes, particularly for people with chronic diseases like diabetes. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, people diagnosed with diabetes have medical expenditures about 2.3 times higher than those without the disease. The U.S. spends \$116 billion annually in direct medical costs for diabetes treatment alone. Diabetes is the leading cause of new cases of blindness, kidney failure, and non-traumatic lower-extremity amputations among adults.

Kevin Kelley, CEO of Community Health Services of Lamoille Valley, where 15,000 of the 25,000 area residents receive their primary care, joined other CEOs and medical directors meeting with Senator Sanders. During the past year, Kelley was able to hire a new clinical social worker and a patient case manager with the help of a grant through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. "As a result, patient enrollment in our financial assistance Charitable Care Program has increased substantially, and our uninsured and underinsured patients are able to concentrate on health and wellness instead of having to decide between health care and the financial burden it can create," said Kelley.

The eight Vermont FQHCs are members of Bi-State Primary Care Association, a nonprofit organization serving the residents of New Hampshire and Vermont by working with federal, state, and regional health policy organizations, foundations, and payers to develop strategies, policies, and programs that promote and sustain community-based primary health care services. A list of health centers in Vermont and New Hampshire can be found at: www.bistatepca.org.