

Upper Valley Oral Health Workgroup—

Last Reviewed Charter on 6/19/2025

Committee Description and Opportunity Statement

Accessing dental care is a challenge for many residents of the Upper Valley region in Vermont and New Hampshire. Some population groups, including those insured by Medicaid or Medicare, those who don't have health or dental insurance, and residents with disabilities have consistently lower access to dental care, according to the 2022 Vermont Oral Health Plan.

The Upper Valley Oral Health Workgroup has an opportunity to contribute to reducing these inequities. One strategy to help improve oral health care in our region is through medical-dental integration, which has been shown to improve health outcomes and reduce the cost of care, according to the 2022 Vermont Oral Health Plan.

Measures

- 36.4 primary care full-time equivalent dentists per 100,000 residents in the White River Junction Local Health district.
- Around 66% of adults in Windsor and Orange counties have seen a dentist in the past year.

Our Business Case

Dental care is a top public health priority in the Upper Valley, as determined by the Community Health Needs Assessment conducted by Dartmouth Health in 2024, as well as the Public Health Council of the Upper Valley's 2023 Community Health Improvement Plan. There is strong evidence that access to routine preventive dental care results in reduced overall medical expenditures, and that this reduction is greater for at-risk populations. Poor dental hygiene and difficulty accessing regular dental care can also raise the likelihood of developing dental pain and decay, which can contribute to difficulty when eating, difficulty finding quality employment, and many related health problems, all of which can lower quality of life. To address these problems, a sense of shared responsibility for supporting priority populations in accessing dental care is needed.

Goal Statement

We intend to consider how we can use evidence-based strategies to increase consistent access to oral health care for all residents of the Upper Valley in VT and NH, with an emphasis on reducing disparities for those with the lowest access to care and worst dental outcomes, in alignment with the Vermont Oral Health Plan. The workgroup will focus on three areas:

1. Furthering our collective understanding of medical-dental integration in our region
2. Promoting opportunities for medical-dental integration in our region
3. Building stronger collaborations between the public health and oral health workforces

Meeting Frequency

Bi-monthly, remote meetings with more frequent email or virtual contacts possible

Committee Scope

In scope: Access to oral health care for residents of the 22 towns within the White River Junction Local Health district and of the 12 towns of NH represented by the Public Health Council of the Upper Valley
Out of scope: Towns outside of the defined region

Resource Plan

Workgroup Lead

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Organizations Represented

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| Vermont Dept. of Health | PHC of the Upper Valley/GUVIST |
| Little Rivers Health Care | Upper Valley Smiles |
| 802 Smiles | Dr. John Echlemach |
| Red Logan Dental Clinic | Health Hub |
| Southern Vermont AHEC | Vermont Chronic Care Initiative |
| Dartmouth Health | VerShare |
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