

VHCA 2024 Annual Report

Message from Our Board President

As President of the VHCA Board, I am pleased to present our 2024 Annual Report.

This year has been marked by intense state level activity. Items negotiated in 2024 included the continuing need for financial stabilization in our sector, state response to workforce shortages, rate restructuring for SNFs, evolving transfer of ownership rules, completion of the Medicaid unwinding, and the first update in licensing regulations for Assisted Living Residences and Residential Care Homes in over two decades. The federal policy environment was similarly challenging as the Biden administration sought to complete major LTC regulatory changes, including with publication of the controversial final rule for nursing home staffing ratios.

VHCA represented members' interests on complex policy issues in an environment of many competing concerns. As this annual report describes, our advocacy efforts have yielded tangible positive results.

In 2024, VHCA also expanded its reach and influence through strengthened national connections. These partnerships have opened new doors for funding, expertise, and innovative approaches to sector-wide challenges.

VHCA continues to deliver high-value benefits to our members. We've enhanced our educational offerings, improved communication channels, and fostered greater member engagement through working groups and committees. The communication options now include an updated Members Only section of VHCA.net where you can find additional details on all the achievements outlined in this report.

As we look to 2025, we are poised to build on these successes and tackle new challenges. Your continued support and engagement are crucial to our collective success. Thank you for your dedication to providing quality care to Vermonters.

Ursula Margazano, LNHA
VP of Senior Services – Gifford Retirement Community

2024 Board Membership

President

Ursula Margazano
Menig Nursing Home (Gifford)

Vice President

Coleen Condon
Franklin County Rehab

Treasurer

Judy Morton
Thompson House

Secretary

Suzanne Anair
Allaire / Centers for Living

RC/AL Executive Committee

Patricia Horn
Cedar Hill Community

Mary Beth Pinard
Vermont Catholic Charities

Amy Walker
Genesis

Mary Jane Nottonson
Helen Porter

Patricia Russell
Kingdom Kare

Alecia DiMario
Birchwood Terrace

Amanda St. Cyr
Brownway Residence

Heather Filonow
Wake Robin

Kim Roberge
Craftsbury Community Care
Home

Lydia Raymond
Residence at Quarry Hill

Jennifer Combs-Wilber
Green Mountain Nursing
Home

Amy Russell
The Pines at Rutland

Todd Patterson
Residence at Shelburne Bay

Dawn Palowski
Westview Meadows & The
Gary Residence

Our Impact in Numbers

- \$21.1 million in SFY2025 Medicaid increases
- \$17 million for Extraordinary Financial Relief added to SFY24 Budget
- \$1 million in new funding for SNF workforce development
- \$140,000 in AHCA/NCAL support for VHCA efforts to improve rates
- 80% of members participated in a working group or committee
- 7 in-person educational events / trainings provided to members
- 73 Virtual Education Sessions
- Return to in-person Conference & Trade Show with 151 attendees

Key Accomplishments

Reimbursement Advocacy

- Reduced SNF minimum occupancy threshold from 90% to 80%
- Negotiated PDPM implementation with the state; secured \$40,000 in technical assistance support; 61 participants in PDPM implementation training
- Secured Extraordinary Financial Relief funding of \$17 million (SFY2024)
- Following a 79% increase in ACCS payment in 2023, overcame a Governor's recommended budget of flat funding to add 3% to both ACCS & ERC rates
- Hosted 2 open door forums with DVHA officials to engage with VHCA members on challenges in ACCS & ERC enrollment and claims processing
- Brought in \$100,000 of funding and managed a public education campaign in summer of 2024 to build support for residential Long Term Care options ahead of the 2025 legislative session
 - [Creative assets developed](#) including photo shoots, radio ads, television ads, print advertising, [campaign website](#)
 - 115 television spots (including during Olympics), 1,158 radio spots (40 stations), 8,290 print ad circulation (Vermont Maturity magazine), 11,531 FB post engagements, 9,197 Google ad engagements
 - Tested different outreach & engagement channels to inform future work

Workforce Development

- Partnered with the state and Excel testing to remove testing-based bottlenecks to LNA certification; LNA testing capacity tripled with the change
- Offered detailed public comment on CMS' SNF staffing ratio rules; worked with Vermont's Congressional delegation to engage CMS on workforce shortage exemption calculation guidance
- Provided technical assistance on workforce-related legal issues, including agency staffing considerations, nursing background checks, and option for LNA training ban waivers
- Obtained \$1 million Legislative appropriation for SNF workforce grants for LNAs and Medical Directors; contracted with DAIL to administer the grants program in SFY2025

Regulatory Support

- Engaged in 16-month process of review, comment, and negotiation on state's proposed updates to AL / RC licensing rules

- Collected extensive member feedback and provided as comment in three rounds of state review
- Provided detailed comments on where draft regulations presented areas of confusion for providers
- Provided talking points for both members and partner organizations to offer their own public comment
- Presented survey-based findings on potential economic impact
- Requested monitoring system for unintended impacts on access
- Met quarterly with state and federal regulators to discuss concerns; hosted Vermont Survey & Certification leadership at two in-person member meetings to discuss survey trends
- Represented VHCA members in advocating for regulatory waivers under Vermont's next phase of value-based health care reform model
- Advocated for removing unnecessary barriers to SNF transfer of ownership review and approval; interim process still in development by the state
- Provided education sessions on areas of Regulatory concern, including admissions policies, agency staffing, federal labor laws, nurse aide testing, and survey compliance.

Member Engagement

- Continued NH HCA partnership to offer a yearlong Virtual Education Series
 - Behavioral Health Series addressing mental illness; monthly falls reduction education with practical application; monthly leadership series; cybersecurity; clinical documentation series; monthly series on being survey ready
- Redesigned and updated VHCA.net including:
 - Member resources sections
 - Find Care directory, featured in 2024 public education campaign
 - All new photography and creative assets, funded by AHCA/NCAL
- Resumed in-person Annual Convention and Annual Meeting
- Built a member communications system including
 - Monthly all-member update
 - Weekly Policy update (during the Legislative session)
 - Newly-added monthly Regulatory update
 - Special updates on Workforce Development and Reimbursement

Financial Overview

Thank you to our Annual Sponsors: Kittell, Branagan & Sargent, Medline, Skilled Cyber and Theoria Medical.

From the Treasurer – Judy Morton, Thompson House:

As we approach the close of 2024, VHCA remains in a strong financial position. Our membership remained stable with 34 skilled nursing facilities, 41 residential care/assisted living, and one independent living member. VHCA has been able to tap into several funding streams to supplement member dues and provide additional benefits to our members, as enumerated below. The audit of our fiscal year 2023 activity has been completed with no findings.

VHCA staff have diversified funding streams to reduce pressure on member dues:

- Pursuing programmatic contracts where the activities match our organizational work plan – for example, partnership with Excel to expand LNA training & testing, contracts with the state for workforce development activities.
- Accessing AHCA/NCAL funding to support member benefits – for example, technical advisors to rate negotiations, PDPM training and implementation, website redesign and public education campaign.
- Resuming in-person Convention and Member Meetings, with opportunities for sponsorship and associate member income.
- Expanding opportunities for income through member participation in training, education, group purchasing, and AHCA/NCAL royalties.

We anticipate continued growth in these revenue streams, which will allow VHCA to continue to expand member benefits and value without major dues increases.

Looking Ahead to 2025

- Expanding workforce development initiatives
- Continuing advocacy for fair reimbursement rates, including navigating changes in Medicare Advantage and health care reform
- Supporting regulatory compliance in changing landscape
- Enhancing member benefits and engagement opportunities