

AIDS Issues in the 1992 Legislative Session: The Good, the Bad, and the Level-Funded

Erica Garfin

The 1992 legislative session ended in the early morning hours on Sunday, April 26, bringing mixed results for Vermont's AIDS community. While the state's economic situation brought less than positive budget news for Vermonters affected by HIV and AIDS, AIDS advocates are celebrating the creation of an HIV/AIDS Insurance Assistance Program.

Based on a 1991 report by the Departments of Health and Social Welfare, Vermont's legislature followed the example set by at least a dozen other states in creating a program to pay continuation premiums for health insurance for people with HIV and AIDS (PWAs). The program will enable individuals who are not eligible for Medicaid to keep their health insurance by paying their premiums for them. Premiums will be paid for people with HIV and AIDS who are no longer working and cannot afford to pay for their existing health insurance policies.

Without this assistance, many people who have left their jobs because of illness no longer have the financial resources to pay their premiums. When people lose their insurance coverage, they rapidly exhaust their assets as they attempt to pay their extraordinarily high medical bills out of their own pockets. They may lack access to critically needed health care as a result.

The loss of health insurance and the resulting impoverishment makes many of these individuals eligible for Medicaid. This is an unwelcome outcome not only for PWAs, but for the state as well. The DSW/DOH report estimates the average annual cost of purchasing insurance for one individual to be \$2,190 in 1992. Contrasted with the recent national estimate of \$32,000 per year to treat a person with full-blown AIDS for one year, the savings created by the insurance assistance program made it especially appealing to the Dean administration in this recessionary period.

In budget news, the Health Department program that minimally supports AIDS service organizations' direct services to people with HIV and AIDS was funded again at the FY 92 level. That means that just under \$40,000 will be provided in grants to AIDS service organizations in the fiscal year that starts in July. In a year when the demand for those services has increased by 60 percent, it is sad indeed to report that avoiding a cut in this underfunded program can be taken as good news.

People with HIV and AIDS who are Medicaid participants fared less well. An increase in the Medicaid co-payment from \$1 to \$2 on all prescriptions over \$25 was passed at the last moment. This increase, which may have a tremendous impact on people with AIDS, is estimated to save the state a mere \$43,000. ▼

This article originally appeared in *The Update, the Statewide Newsletter of the Vermont AIDS Community*.

Health Resource Organizations

AIDS HOTLINES:

Vermont	1-800-882-2437
New Hampshire	1-800-752-2437
New York State	1-800-541-2437
Massachusetts	1-617-522-4090
Maine	1-800-851-2437
National	1-800-342-2437
Canadian	1-613-563-2437

AIDS Community Awareness Project (ACAP)

PO Box 608
St. Johnsbury VT 05819
(802) 748-1149

AIDS Community Resource Network (ACoRN)

PO Box 2057
Lebanon NH 03766
(603) 448-2220

Bennington Area AIDS Project

PO Box 1066
Bennington VT 05201
(802) 442-4481 or 1-800-845-2437

Brattleboro AIDS Project

4 High Street, Suite 2-3
Brattleboro VT 05301
(802) 254-4444 (Helpline)
(802) 254-8263 (Office)

Franklin-Grand Isle AIDS Task Force

8 Ferris Street
St. Albans VT 05478 • (802) 524-7742
1-800-638-7834

Gay/Lesbian Alcoholics Anonymous

GLAA, P.O. Box 5653
Burlington, VT 05402

H.E.A.L. Vermont (Holistic Education and AIDS Alternatives Liaison)

PO Box 795
Montpelier VT 05602 • (802) 229-4325

Lesbian Cancer Support Group

(802) 660-8386

Northeast Kingdom AIDS Coalition

PO Box 40
Newport VT 05855 • (802) 334-2437

North Star (Holistic Health Care)

RR2 Box 3255
Morrisville VT 05661 • (802) 888-2858

Vermont AIDS Council

PO Box 275
Montpelier VT 05601 • (802) 229-2557

Vermont C.A.R.E.S.

(Committee for AIDS Resources, Education, and Services)
PO Box 5248
30 Elmwood Avenue
Burlington VT 05401
(802) 863-2437 (Burlington)
1-800-649-2437 (Rutland and Washington County support groups)

Vermont Department of Health

1-800-882-2437 (AIDS Hotline) or
(802) 863-7245 (AIDS Program office)

VT PWA Coalition

PO Box 1055
Brattleboro, VT 05502
1-800-69-VTPWA or (802) 257-9277

Vermont Women's Health Center

336 North Avenue
Burlington VT 05401 • (802) 863-1386