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H.129

Introduced by Representatives Cina of Burlington, Christie of Hartford,  
Bartholomew of Hartland, Birong of Vergennes, Briglin of  
Thetford, Burke of Brattleboro, Campbell of St. Johnsbury,  
Chesnut-Tangerman of Middletown Springs, Colburn of  
Burlington, Conlon of Cornwall, Cordes of Lincoln, Demrow of  
Corinth, Donovan of Burlington, Durfee of Shaftsbury, Elder of  
Starksboro, Emmons of Springfield, Gonzalez of Winooski,  
Haas of Rochester, Hooper of Randolph, Hooper of Burlington,  
Houghton of Essex, Howard of Rutland City, Jessup of  
Middlesex, Kitzmiller of Montpelier, Kornheiser of Brattleboro,  
Macaig of Williston, Masland of Thetford, McCarthy of St.  
Albans City, McCormack of Burlington, McCullough of  
Williston, McFaun of Barre Town, Mrowicki of Putney, Nicoll  
of Ludlow, O'Brien of Tunbridge, O'Sullivan of Burlington,  
Page of Newport City, Partridge of Windham, Patt of  
Worcester, Ralph of Hartland, Scheu of Middlebury, Sheldon of  
Middlebury, Sullivan of Burlington, Szott of Barnard,  
Townsend of South Burlington, Troiano of Stannard, White of  
Hartford, Yacovone of Morristown, and Yantachka of Charlotte

1 Referred to Committee on

2 Date:

3 Subject: Health; primary care; public financing

4 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to establish a  
5 universal, publicly financed primary care program for all Vermont residents  
6 beginning in 2023.

7 An act relating to a universal, publicly financed primary care program for  
8 Vermont

9 It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

10 Sec. 1. UNIVERSAL PRIMARY CARE; INTENT

11 (a) It is the intent of the General Assembly to create and implement a  
12 program of universal, publicly financed primary care for all Vermont residents.  
13 The program should ensure that Vermonters have access to primary health care  
14 without facing financial barriers that might otherwise discourage them from  
15 seeking necessary care.

16 (b) The General Assembly continues to support the principles for health  
17 care reform enacted in 2011 Acts and Resolves No. 48, Sec. 1a, and plans to  
18 use universal primary care as a platform for a tiered approach to achieving  
19 universal health care coverage.

1       (c) In order to improve Vermonters' access to essential health care services,  
2       it is the intent of the General Assembly that universal access to primary care  
3       services should be available without cost-sharing.

4       Sec. 2. UNIVERSAL PRIMARY CARE; FINDINGS

5       The General Assembly finds that:

6           (1) Universal access to primary care will advance the health of  
7       Vermonters by addressing Vermonters' health care problems before they  
8       become more serious and more costly. A large volume of research from  
9       throughout the United States concludes that increased access to primary care  
10       enhances the overall quality of care and improves patient outcomes.

11           (2) Universal access to primary care will reduce systemwide health care  
12       spending. A study completed in accordance with 2016 Acts and Resolves  
13       No. 172, Sec. E.100.10 and submitted on November 23, 2016 found significant  
14       cost savings in a review of data from nonuniversal public and private primary  
15       care programs in the United States and around the world. One reason for these  
16       savings is that better access to primary care reduces the need for emergency  
17       room visits and hospital admissions.

18           (3) The best primary care program is one that provides primary care for  
19       all residents without point-of-service patient cost-sharing or insurance  
20       deductibles for primary care services. The study completed in accordance with  
21       2016 Acts and Resolves No. 172, Sec. E.100.10 found that primary care

1 cost-sharing in many locales decreased health care utilization and affected  
2 individuals with low income disproportionately.

3 (4) A universal primary care program will build on and support existing  
4 health care reform efforts, such as the Blueprint for Health, the all-payer  
5 model, and accountable care organizations.

6 (5) A universal primary care program can be structured in such a way as  
7 to create model working conditions for primary care physicians, who are  
8 currently overburdened with paperwork and administrative duties, and who are  
9 reimbursed at rates disproportionately lower than those of other specialties.

10 (6) The costs of a universal primary care program for Vermont were  
11 estimated in a study ordered by the General Assembly in 2015 Acts and  
12 Resolves No. 54, Secs. 16–19 and submitted on December 16, 2015.

13 Sec. 3. UNIVERSAL PRIMARY CARE; DRAFT OPERATIONAL MODEL;

14 REPORT

15 (a)(1) The Green Mountain Care Board shall convene, facilitate, and  
16 supervise the participation of certified accountable care organizations, Bi-State  
17 Primary Care, and other interested stakeholders with applicable subject matter  
18 expertise to develop a draft operational model for a universal, publicly  
19 financed primary care program.

1           (2)(A) Using as its basis the primary care service categories and primary  
2           care specialty types described in 33 V.S.A. § 1852, the draft operational model  
3           shall address at least the following components:

4                   (i) who would be eligible to receive publicly financed universal  
5           primary care services under the program;

6                   (ii) who would deliver care under the program and in what  
7           settings;

8                   (iii) how funding for the primary care services would move  
9           through the health care system; and

10                   (iv) how to ensure maintenance of records demonstrating quality  
11           of care without increasing the administrative burden on primary care providers.

12           (B) In addition to the components described in subdivision (A) of this  
13           subdivision (2), the draft operational model may also include recommendations  
14           regarding the specific services that should be included in the universal primary  
15           care program and a methodology or benchmark for determining reimbursement  
16           rates to primary care providers.

17           (3) The Senate Committee on Health and Welfare and the House  
18           Committee on Health Care may meet up to five times following the  
19           adjournment of the General Assembly in 2019 to provide guidance and receive  
20           updates from the Green Mountain Care Board and participating stakeholders

1 developing the draft operational model for universal primary care pursuant to  
2 this subsection.

3 (4) All relevant State agencies shall provide timely responses to requests  
4 for information from the Green Mountain Care Board and participating  
5 stakeholders developing the draft operational model for universal primary care  
6 pursuant to this subsection.

7 (5) The Green Mountain Care Board and participating stakeholders shall  
8 submit the draft operational model for universal, publicly financed primary  
9 care on or before January 1, 2020 to the House Committee on Health Care, the  
10 Senate Committees on Health and Welfare and on Finance, the Department of  
11 Human Resources, and the Department of Vermont Health Access.

12 (b) On or before July 1, 2020, the Departments of Human Resources and of  
13 Vermont Health Access, as the administrative departments with expertise and  
14 experience in the administration and oversight of health benefit programs in  
15 this State, shall provide to the House Committee on Health Care and the Senate  
16 Committees on Health and Welfare and on Finance their assessments of the  
17 draft operational model plan for universal primary care and their  
18 recommendations with respect to implementation of the universal primary care  
19 program.

20 (c) On or before July 1, 2020, the Department of Financial Regulation shall  
21 provide to the House Committee on Health Care and the Senate Committees on

1 Health and Welfare and on Finance its recommendations for appropriate  
2 mechanisms for the State to employ to obtain reinsurance and to guarantee the  
3 solvency of the universal primary care program.

4 Sec. 4. UNIVERSAL PRIMARY CARE; LEGAL ANALYSIS; REPORT

5 The Office of the Attorney General, in consultation with the Green  
6 Mountain Care Board and the Department of Financial Regulation, shall  
7 conduct a legal analysis of any potential legal issues regarding implementation  
8 of a universal primary care program in Vermont, including whether there are  
9 likely any legal impediments due to federal preemption under the Employee  
10 Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) and whether the program could be  
11 designed in a manner that would permit Vermont residents to continue to be  
12 eligible under federal law to use a health savings account established in  
13 conjunction with a high-deductible health plan. The Office shall submit its  
14 legal analysis on or before January 1, 2020 to the House Committee on Health  
15 Care and the Senate Committees on Health and Welfare and on Finance.

16 Sec. 5. UNIVERSAL PRIMARY CARE; SCOPE OF SERVICES AND  
17 PROVIDERS; REPORT

18 (a) The Green Mountain Care Board shall convene a working group of  
19 interested stakeholders with applicable subject matter expertise to develop:

20 (1) recommendations for the specific services and providers that should  
21 be included in the universal primary care program, including the scope of the

1 mental health and substance use disorder services, and suggested modifications  
2 to 33 V.S.A. § 1852(a)(1) and (2);

3 (2) methods to resolve coordination of benefits issues in the universal  
4 primary care program; and

5 (3) recommendations for strategies to address other issues associated  
6 with the development and implementation of the universal primary care  
7 program.

8 (b) On or before October 1, 2019, the Green Mountain Care Board shall  
9 provide the working group's recommendations to the House Committee on  
10 Health Care and the Senate Committees on Health and Welfare and on  
11 Finance.

12 Sec. 6. IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE; CONDITIONS

13 (a) In addition to the plans, assessments, and analyses required by Secs. 3,  
14 4, and 5 of this act, it is the intent of the General Assembly to pursue the  
15 following implementation timeline for the universal primary care program:

16 (1) submission by the Agency of Human Services of a final  
17 implementation plan for universal primary care on or before January 1, 2021;

18 (2) enactment by the General Assembly of the funding mechanism or  
19 mechanisms during the 2021 legislative session;

1           (3) application by the Agency of Human Services to the U.S.  
2           Department of Health and Human Services for all necessary waivers and  
3           approvals for universal primary care on or before January 1, 2022; and

4           (4) coverage of publicly financed primary care services for Vermont  
5           residents under the universal primary care program beginning on or before  
6           January 1, 2023.

7           (b) Implementation of the universal primary care program shall occur only  
8           if the following conditions are met:

9           (1) the program will not increase the administrative burden on primary  
10          care providers;

11          (2) the program will provide reimbursement amounts for primary care  
12          services that are sufficient to attract an adequate number of primary care  
13          providers to participate;

14          (3) the program has appropriate financing in place to support the  
15          covered services while ensuring the continued solvency of the program;

16          (4) the program will include coverage for basic mental health care;

17          (5) the program will not include coverage for dental care services;

18          (6) the program will provide clear information to health care providers  
19          and consumers regarding which services are covered and which services are  
20          not covered under the universal primary care program; and

1           (7) the program adheres to the principles of 2011 Acts and Resolves

2           No. 48, Sec. 1a.

3           Sec. 7. 33 V.S.A. chapter 18, subchapter 3 is added to read:

4                               Subchapter 3. Universal Primary Care

5           § 1851. DEFINITIONS

6           As used in this section:

7                       (1) “Health care facility” shall have the same meaning as in

8           18 V.S.A. § 9402.

9                       (2) “Health care provider” means a person, partnership, or corporation,  
10           including a health care facility, that is licensed, certified, or otherwise  
11           authorized by law to provide professional health care services in this State to  
12           an individual during that individual’s medical care, treatment, or confinement.

13                      (3) “Health service” means any treatment or procedure delivered by a  
14           health care professional to maintain an individual’s physical or mental health  
15           or to diagnose or treat an individual’s physical or mental condition or  
16           intellectual disability, including services ordered by a health care professional,  
17           chronic care management, preventive care, wellness services, and medically  
18           necessary services to assist in activities of daily living.

19                      (4) “Primary care” means health services provided by health care  
20           professionals who are specifically trained for and skilled in first-contact and  
21           continuing care for individuals with signs, symptoms, or health concerns, not

1 limited by problem origin, organ system, or diagnosis. Primary care does not  
2 include dental services.

3 (5) "Vermont resident" means an individual domiciled in Vermont as  
4 evidenced by an intent to maintain a principal dwelling place in Vermont  
5 indefinitely and to return to Vermont if temporarily absent, coupled with an act  
6 or acts consistent with that intent. The Secretary of Human Services shall  
7 establish specific criteria for demonstrating residency.

8 § 1852. UNIVERSAL PRIMARY CARE

9 (a) It is the intent of the General Assembly that all Vermont residents  
10 should receive publicly financed primary care services.

11 (1) The following service categories should be included in a universal  
12 primary care program when provided by a health care provider in one of the  
13 primary care specialty types described in subdivision (2) of this subsection:

14 (A) new or established patient office or other outpatient visit;

15 (B) initial new or established patient preventive medicine evaluation;

16 (C) other preventive services;

17 (D) patient office consultation;

18 (E) administration of vaccine;

19 (F) prolonged patient service or office or other outpatient service;

20 (G) prolonged physician service;

21 (H) initial or subsequent nursing facility visit;

1           (I) other nursing facility service;

2           (J) new or established patient home visit;

3           (K) new or established patient assisted living visit;

4           (L) other home or assisted living facility service;

5           (M) alcohol, smoking, or substance use disorder screening or  
6           counseling;

7           (N) all-inclusive clinic visit at a federally qualified health center or  
8           rural health clinic; and

9           (O) mental health.

10           (2) Services provided by a licensed health care provider in one of the  
11           following primary care specialty types should be included in universal primary  
12           care when providing services in one of the primary care service categories  
13           described in subdivision (1) of this subsection:

14           (A) family medicine physician;

15           (B) registered nurse;

16           (C) internal medicine physician;

17           (D) pediatrician;

18           (E) physician assistant or advanced practice registered nurse;

19           (F) psychiatrist;

20           (G) obstetrician/gynecologist;

21           (H) naturopathic physician;

1           (I) geriatrician;

2           (J) registered nurse certified in psychiatric or mental health nursing;

3           (K) social worker;

4           (L) psychologist;

5           (M) clinical mental health counselor; and

6           (N) alcohol and drug abuse counselor.

7           (b) For Vermont residents covered under Medicare, Medicare should  
8           continue to be the primary payer for primary care services, but the State of  
9           Vermont should cover any co-payment or deductible amounts required from a  
10           Medicare beneficiary for primary care services.

11           § 1853. UNIVERSAL PRIMARY CARE FUND

12           (a) The Universal Primary Care Fund is established in the State Treasury as  
13           a special fund to be the single source to finance primary care for Vermont  
14           residents.

15           (b) Into the Fund shall be deposited:

16           (1) transfers or appropriations from the General Fund, authorized by the  
17           General Assembly;

18           (2) revenue from any taxes established for the purpose of funding  
19           universal primary care in Vermont;

1           (3) if authorized by waivers from federal law, federal funds from  
2           Medicaid and from subsidies associated with the Vermont Health Benefit  
3           Exchange established in subchapter 1 of this chapter; and

4           (4) the proceeds from grants, donations, contributions, taxes, and any  
5           other sources of revenue as may be provided by statute or by rule.

6           (c) The Fund shall be administered pursuant to 32 V.S.A. chapter 7,  
7           subchapter 5, except that interest earned on the Fund and any remaining  
8           balance shall be retained in the Fund. The Agency of Human Services shall  
9           maintain records indicating the amount of money in the Fund at any time.

10          (d) All monies received by or generated to the Fund shall be used only for  
11          payments to health care providers for primary care health services delivered to  
12          Vermont residents and to cover any co-payment or deductible amounts  
13          required from Medicare beneficiaries for primary care services.

14          Sec. 8. EFFECTIVE DATE

15          This act shall take effect on passage.