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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Sounding the Alarm- Vermont Care Partners Calls Press Conference to Request 3% Medicaid Rate Increase**

*Montpelier, VT– Vermont Care Partners (VCP) is holding a press conference tomorrow, Thursday, February 25 from 11:00 to 11:30 AM in the Cedar Creek Room of the Statehouse. The press conference will address the chronic reimbursement challenges faced by community mental health and developmental disability agencies.*

Vermont's Designated Mental Health and Developmental Disability Agencies are requesting a 3% Medicaid rate increase for each of the next four years. Consumers, families, board members, community partners and agency leaders are making their voices heard on this critical and timely issue.

Mary Moulton, the Executive Director of Washington County Mental Health Services, says, "The designated agencies will not be able to meet their commitments to their communities or our contractual obligations to the State without significant Medicaid rate increases."

Over the past ten years, aggregated cost of living increases (COLAs) received by Designated/Specialized Services Agencies (DA/SSAs) have fallen 13% behind the New England average. Salary differentials between designated agency and public employees are often \$13,000 to \$16,000 per year or more.

These compensation rates are inadequate to maintain a stable workforce and statewide agency turnover rates are now at 27.5% annually. Access to and quality of treatment is compromised by rapid staff turnover and vacancies. Hundreds of Vermonters are on waiting lists because of staff vacancies.

"The designated system of care is heading on a potentially catastrophic course, and we have the duty and responsibility to sound the alarm," says Julie Tessler, Executive Director of the Vermont Council of Developmental and Mental Health Services. Tessler adds, "This provider network is ready and willing to continue the good work done every day, but we must see action on a 3% Medicaid rate increase to ensure this well-established system of mental health, developmental disabilities and substance abuse services continues to provide support to Vermont's communities."

Last year, the VCP network offered services to over 35,000 Vermonters with mental health, developmental and substance use challenges of all ages, and of those, 92% said services they receive made a difference.

All VCP agencies work collaboratively with health care providers, including FQHC's. Agencies recognize the connection between an individual's social circumstances, daily living patterns, environment and their overall health.

By being community based, designated and specialized service providers have strong relationships and close access to those in need, and this in turn yields many positive results, including reduced costs to the criminal justice system, greater success for struggling students in schools, increased employment for clients, fewer emergency room visits and inpatient/institutional care, and successful recovery from addictive disorders.

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Vermont Care Partners is a collaboration between the Vermont Care Network and Vermont Council on Developmental and Mental Health Services. VCP's mission is to provide statewide leadership for an integrated, high quality system of comprehensive services and supports. VCP's provider network consists of sixteen non-profit community-based agencies specializing in mental health, developmental disability and substance use disorder services.