

Why Vermont needs the HIV supportive services and care programming **Vermont CARES offers:**

- The state's largest and longest-serving AIDS Service Organization, we provide comprehensive HIV-related support services to hundreds of Vermonters annually. From someone learning their HIV status, to initial medical appointments, to ongoing support through a potential AIDS diagnosis, we are there to care for people with HIV every step of the way.
- Our services are designed to help individuals and families affected by HIV navigate the complicated medical, social, and financial landscape of an HIV or AIDS diagnosis. We have been offering these services since we formed as a grassroots group of volunteers in 1985. We have since expanded, involved paid staff, and have increased the quality of how we care for individuals across Vermont with multiple health needs.
- HIV care is often more resource-intensive than care for other illnesses. This is due to the nature of HIV and its relation to disenfranchised groups who may have fewer social or economic opportunities, but also to the stigma that keeps our clients from the familial, social, and political resources that make other diseases treatable and socially acceptable. Financial crisis both exacerbates HIV risk, but also reduces life expectancy.
- People living with HIV/AIDS are living longer, healthier lives, and our programs center around helping that process. This includes paying for medication copays, securing housing to keep someone safe and sheltered, or driving someone to a medical appointment they would otherwise miss because of transportation difficulties.
- Treatment for HIV, despite advances in medication and care, remains challenging and persistent. Medication is often more compromising than the virus itself. The side effects and long term health consequences of HIV infection have continued to evolve, and our case management has evolved as well. With more expertise in long-term care, mental health, and respite care, our Program Specialists are keeping pace with HIV disease.
- HIV may be more manageable for those with support, financial means, and health access; for these people it can be seen as a chronic infection necessitating ongoing treatment. For those without these supports, HIV is more often than not a terminal illness. Vermont CARES enables these supports, results in stronger health, and strives for a stronger quality of life.
- To effectively address the link between HIV and poverty, we offer financial support through housing, emergency financial assistance, or donated goods and services. This helps our clients maintain focus on strong lifelong health.
- The long-term solution for addressing the HIV/poverty cycle lies with broader social and political change, stronger advocacy among social safety nets, and increased employment and other social connections. We strive to break the cycle of HIV/AIDS and reduced economic opportunity, racism, homophobia, sexism, and other oppressions.
- Our anti-stigma program – “Get to Know” – is designed to reduce stereotypes and misconceptions about HIV so that people living with the virus are treated with the respect, dignity, and compassion they deserve. Our goal is that care for HIV should be mainstream and similar to how people care for other diseases.