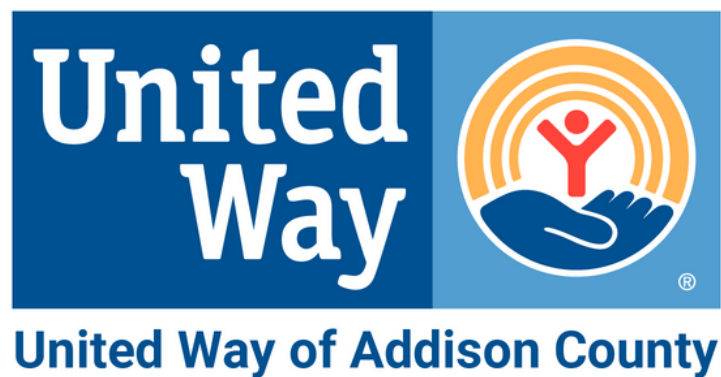


Listening Tour

In the fall of 2021, we interviewed 19 funded partners and 3 neighboring United Ways as part of our 3 month advocacy listening tour. Our desired outcomes were:

- To have a better understanding of our partner's advocacy efforts and goals
- To use this information to create a policy priority agenda at UWAC
- To expand our knowledge of policy and legislative efforts in Addison County and across Vermont
- Strengthen relationships with funded partners and legislators
- To understand how our advocacy efforts could support neighboring United Ways

We asked the same questions to our funded partners and United Ways in each interview. (Partners interviewed included: Addison County Home Health and Hospice, WomenSafe, Vermont Adult Learning, Turning Point, Tri-Valley Transit, Lund, Open Door Clinic, New Community Project, John Graham Housing and Services, The Hub, Addison Central Teens, Elderly Services, DREAM, CSAC, Charter House, Bristol Family Center, Age Well, Addison County Community Trust, Mary Johnson Children's Center).



United Way of Addison County (UWAC) is a non-profit organization that identifies important issues in Addison County and strives to understand and address them at their root. In recent years, UWAC has worked to reduce youth substance use, move families out of poverty, prepare youth for success, support young children and families, promote health, and care for our elders. UWAC invests the community's philanthropic support in programs essential to improving every person's health, education, and financial stability in Addison County. In times of crisis, we secure and deploy additional funds to ensure the high-quality services local organizations provide are there when our community needs them most. UWAC also provides a robust volunteer center to strengthen community ties and broaden a network of support for our community. There is more we can do for Addison County. We are pleased to announce our commitment to advancing equity and decreasing disparities in our community through advocacy.

Our Policy Guidelines

We are committed to achieving a more comprehensive approach that invests needed resources in education, childcare, healthcare, affordable housing, job training, and other programs and services that promote social determinants of health to build safer and more vibrant communities.

As we rebuild and strengthen communities, we must listen to and lift the voices and experiences of impacted people and communities. More fundamentally, when we center and address the needs of the most marginalized, we recognize their humanity and advance equity and opportunity for all people in Addison County.

Our guiding principles:

As we evaluate policy proposals and legislation, we specifically examine the extent to which they:

- Decrease disparities and promote equity
- Include funding needed to implement and achieve desired outcomes fully
- Are championed by advocates with lived experience or who are from impacted communities
- Align with UWAC's community impact work and investments
- Provide long term bipartisan solutions

Our Policy Priorities

1. Healthcare
2. Mental Health
3. Youth Substance Prevention
4. Childcare
5. Digital Equity
6. Affordable Housing
7. Workforce Development

After analyzing our funded partner interviews, we determined a significant need for local-level advocacy support. In addition to our policy priorities, UWAC is committed to helping our funded partners:

- Increase organization visibility
- Share the stories that broadcast their organizational importance and impact and help identify systemic barriers
- Build capacity for waiver/removal of non-profit petitioning for town funding
- Facilitate/organize community leader and legislator meetings and visits when possible

Healthcare

"We were invisible in the past. When you think of healthcare, you think of doctors offices, hospitals, but we are on the frontlines."

-Deb Wesley, Addison County Home Health & Hospice

As we continue our efforts to recover, rebuild, and reimagine, all Addison County residents must have healthcare coverage that is accessible, affordable, and adequate at every stage in their life.

According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), from 2000 to 2018, Vermont's per-person spending on health care rose quicker than rents, utility bills, and State appropriations. Access to affordable healthcare remains out of reach for too many, especially for individuals of color, the LGBTQIA+ community, and other minority populations. We will advocate for and support bipartisan efforts to make healthcare coverage more affordable and accessible. Through our conversations with our partnered healthcare organizations, and our research we were able to find key challenges our community is currently facing in terms of healthcare. United Way of Addison County aims to address these specific challenges in 2022:

- Ensure access to telehealth services remains affordable, accessible, and sustainable for organizations and patients
- Increase access to essential healthcare services, specifically for child care employees through ensuring the success of the H171 bill
- Increase health literacy assistance for all, especially for migrant farmworkers and minority populations
- Increase awareness of health inequities among vulnerable populations

Mental Health

"...we need to remember that COVID-19 is not our only serious public health challenge. Our mental health system is facing serious stress."

- Governor Phil Scott

Mental Health is as important as physical health, and we should treat it as such. Nearly 70% of youth in Vermont reported that the COVID-19 pandemic made their anxiety/worry, mood, or loneliness "a little" or "a lot" worse. (2020 VT Youth Planet Survey). In addition to long waitlists and social stigmas, it can be cost-prohibitive to seek mental healthcare because it is often poorly covered by insurance. The pandemic and the economic recession have negatively impacted many people's mental health and created new barriers for mental illness and substance use disorders. More resources are needed to address the capacity of local communities to meet the needs of those struggling most. Poor mental health is a rising issue across our state, we have identified several issues including lack of access to mental health care and contributing factors towards poor mental health. United Way of Addison County aims to address these specific challenges in 2022:

- Ensure access to tele-mental health services remains affordable, accessible, and sustainable for organizations and patients
- Increase mental health access for all, especially for youth, elderly, and minority populations
- Increase awareness of mental health inequities among vulnerable populations

Youth Substance Prevention

"It should be implicit that teens are a significant part of the community."

- Taylor Welch, The Hub

According to the 2019/2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, Vermont drug and alcohol use 12 or older, ranked the state among the highest in illicit drug use (past 30 days), marijuana use (past year), and cocaine use (past year). Vermont ranked among the highest in the past year heroin use (18 years +) and among the highest in binge alcohol use (past 30 days, ages 12-17). Our goal is to reduce these numbers, understanding that if we do, we'll see positive outcomes in the health, education, and financial stability of every person in Addison County and across Vermont. Communities who work collaboratively at prioritizing public health and who implement policies that promote wellness and safety are more likely to see a decrease in youth substance use, an increase in perceived risks of adolescent drug use, and an increased likelihood of positive outcomes. United Way of Addison County aims to address these specific challenges in 2022:

- Increase & sustain funding to continue education, outreach, and programming
- Increase awareness and access to resources for parents and youth

Childcare

"If people felt well compensated, it would bring a sense of being well respected and would bring more people to the field."

- Kristin Dunne, Mary Johnson Children Center

An estimated 50% of Vermont's infants and toddlers who need child care do not have access to a regulated facility or early learning program. Not only is it difficult to access, but the cost of child care is higher than ever. According to the 2021 Community Health Needs Assessment, 85% of parents in Addison County report they are spending 10% or more of their household income on child care (compared to 72% in 2020). Families whose income decreased during the pandemic faced greater difficulty accessing childcare than those whose income was not affected.

Children and youth are the future, investing in their lives should be among the top priorities of the Addison County community. Children need safe environments to grow, learn and thrive. Things like housing, food, childcare, positive role models, parental figures, and quality education are essential for their success. United Way of Addison County aims to address these specific challenges in 2022:

- Increase access to resources and programming for youth and families
- Increase capacity and understanding for improved compensation packages
- Follow and report on the progress of H171 Bill

Digital Equity

"When one of the only ways to safely connect is not an option, it makes you feel even more alone."

- Olivia Brooks, United Way of Addison County

Approximately 60,000 locations in Vermont lack access to broadband. According to the Pew Research Center, before the pandemic, nearly one in five teenagers in the country said they had not completed homework assignments due to a lack of a reliable internet connection. The digital divide calls further attention to the existing wealth and income gaps in our communities; many people, including those of color, people with disabilities, low-income households, and rural communities, overwhelmingly impacted by the digital skills gap, are at risk of being left behind.

Digital Equity is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services. Everyone must have equal access to technology and the internet for things such as community engagement, employment, learning opportunities, health care and more. United Way of Addison County aims to address these specific challenges in 2022:

- Increase awareness of the importance of access to broadband networks and technology
- Increase awareness of the importance of digital literacy

Affordable Housing

"Our housing crisis isn't new. The current energy, public interest, and financial resources made available to address it, however, is unprecedented. Now is the time."

- Helena Van Voorst, United Way of Addison County

Though Vermont's median income is higher than the national average, Vermont has one of the highest living costs in the country, making it increasingly difficult even for folks with stable jobs and moderate incomes. According to the Vermont Housing Finance Agency, Nearly 40% of all households in Vermont rent or are cost-burdened. The pandemic and the economic recession have only increased the threat of mass evictions, displacement, and homelessness for people in our community, many of them without the resources and protections they need to remain stably housed. Furthermore, with Vermont colleges like UVM and Middlebury College accepting record numbers of students for in-person learning, the need for housing has increased as on-campus housing has become more limited. With all of this, even more, Vermonters are struggling to buy or rent due to affordability and availability issues. United Way of Addison County aims to address these specific challenges in 2022:

- Increase capacity for more affordable housing in Addison County
- Increase awareness of substandard housing in Addison County so that those needs can be addressed
- Increase capacity to access more transitional housing for people in recovery

Workforce Development

"I would really like to see comprehensive programs that lead youth into the workforce in a healthy way."

- Linsey Fuentes, Addison Central Teens

Vermont's aging population and demographic shifts have decreased the supply of available workers to support Vermont's businesses and economy. Low compensation, lack of health insurance, and a lack of childcare coverage, are a few of the reasons why people are leaving their jobs. A recent report by the University of Vermont stated: "[Vermont's] educational systems are not sufficiently designed for preparing Vermont's young people to find meaningful and well-paying career pathways." Vermont needs to align its secondary and technical education centers around current workforce development needs and opportunities and ensure that they are available statewide. United Way of Addison County aims to address these specific challenges in 2022:

- Increase awareness and understanding of equitable hiring processes
- Increase capacity and understanding for improved compensation packages, especially for educators, healthcare, and social workers
- Increase funding for comprehensive programs that lead youth into the workforce in healthy ways
- Increase focus on training and stabilization
- Increase awareness of workforce development inequities

Thank you

Thank you to all of our funded partners, fellow Vermont United Ways, and leaders in the community who participated in our Advocacy Listening Tour:

Addison County Home Health and Hospice

Addison Central Teens

Addison County Community Trust

Age Well

Bristol Family Center

Charter House

CSAC

DREAM

Elderly Services

Green Mountain United Way

John Graham Housing and Services

Lund

Mary Johnson Children's Center

New Community Project

Open Door Clinic

Turning Point

Tri-Valley Transit

The Hub

United Way of Rutland County

UW North West VT

Vermont Adult Learning

WomenSafe

Contact Us



Jesse Brooks, Director of Advocacy
United Way of Addison County
jesse@unitedwayaddisoncounty.org
802-388-7189 ext. 209



Celia Heath, Public Health & Advocacy Coordinator
United Way of Addison County
celia@unitedwayaddisoncounty.org
802-388-7189 ext. 211



Helena Van Voorst, Executive Director
United Way of Addison County
helena@unitedwayaddisoncounty.org
802-388-7189 ext. 204

United Way of Addison County
175 Wilson Road, Suite 101
Middlebury, VT 05753
www.unitedwayaddisoncounty.org