

Toward a unified policy approach for Healthcare Is a Human Right and the People's Budget

1. The purpose of public policies is to meet people's needs and rights, guided by principles

- The purpose of government, and of public policymaking, is to improve people's well-being and ensure their rights.
- Public policy must be developed in accordance with people's needs and rights. This must apply to budget and revenue policy, as well as to single issue policy areas, such as health policy. To do so, policymaking must be guided by principles.
- Vermont's universal healthcare law, Act 48, is guided by the principles of universality and equity: it requires the state to ensure everyone's access to needed healthcare and to finance healthcare services equitably. It is our task to make sure that the transition to Green Mountain Care makes this a reality. It is also our task to make this happen in all other areas of public policy, through changing the budget & revenue process.

2. All our needs and rights are connected; we must refrain from pitting one right, or one community, against another

- If every public policy is required to start with a focus on people's needs, then decisions about resources must follow from that. The focus of health policy must be to keep people as healthy as possible and to meet everyone's health needs. The financing of our healthcare system must follow from this focus. Similarly, the focus of housing policy must be to ensure that everyone has access to safe and affordable housing, and resources must be allocated accordingly. It is our task to avoid pitting health against housing policy. Even if we were willing to prioritize health over other rights (which would be unethical and irrational), it would be counter-productive to take resources from housing to finance our health system, since our health is largely affected by social and economic determinants of health, including housing as well as our other areas of fundamental need.
- To push back against competitive and divide & conquer tactics, it is our task to address health policy as one of many other policy areas, all of which come together in the budget and revenue process.

3. The services and goods we require to ensure our rights must be treated as public goods

- The services, goods and infrastructure necessary to realize people's rights and meet their needs must be treated as public goods. This includes healthcare, as well as our other needs and rights, such as education, housing, food, and social security.

- Public goods belong to all and are shared by all through tax-based financing. Their purpose is to ensure the well-being of the people and to meet everyone's needs.
- Budget & revenue policy and issue-specific public policies must ensure that public goods are resourced in accordance with the scope and depth of need among the population.

Example: The National Health Service in the United Kingdom

The NHS belongs to the people. It is there to improve our health and wellbeing, supporting us to keep mentally and physically well, to get better when we are ill and, when we cannot fully recover, to stay as well as we can to the end of our lives. It works at the limits of science – bringing the highest levels of human knowledge and skill to save lives and improve health. It touches our lives at times of basic human need, when care and compassion are what matter most. (Source: NHS Constitution)

4. Every person and every community has a right to the appropriate services that enable them to meet their needs

- Universality in budget & revenue policy: Vermont must ensure that adequate resources are raised and spent to meet everyone's needs, including healthcare, housing, education, food, education, social and income security, good jobs, and a healthy environment.
- Universality in healthcare policy: All people in Vermont must get the healthcare they need, when they need it. Universal care must not have any barriers. The focus must be on care, not coverage.

Example: The National Health Service in the United Kingdom

The NHS provides a comprehensive service, available to all [...]. It has a duty to each and every individual that it serves and must respect their human rights. At the same time, it has a wider social duty to promote equality through the services it provides and to pay particular attention to groups or sections of society where improvements in health and life expectancy are not keeping pace with the rest of the population. (Source: NHS Constitution)

- The purpose of public policy is to meet every person's and every community's needs, e.g. the goal must be to ensure everyone is healthy, housed, educated, etc. Therefore, public policy must be developed with the presumption that everyone should be able to meet their needs, rather than a presumption of scarcity of resources and arbitrary limits imposed on services that could meet our needs (which inevitably leads to instituting a hierarchy of needs or population groups).
- This means access to care must not be dependent on restrictive insurance benefits

packages with a certain actuarial value, just as the provision of public services more generally must not be dependent on an estimate of projected revenue. Instead, policies must start with the presumption that needs should be met, then proceed with a democratic process (e.g. participatory tax decisions or, in health policy, an independent regulatory body on clinical effectiveness) to regulate the raising and allocation of resources, with a view to addressing the greatest scope and depth of need in a way that benefits the population as a whole.

Example: The National Health Service in the United Kingdom

[As a UK resident] you have the right to expect your NHS to assess the health requirements of your community and to commission and put in place the services to meet those needs as considered necessary [...].

The NHS is committed to providing best value for taxpayers' money and the most effective, fair and sustainable use of finite resources. Public funds for healthcare will be devoted solely to the benefit of the people that the NHS serves. (Source: NHS Constitution)

Our policy positions:

→ HCHR: everyone has the right to get the care they need, instead of a package of insurance benefits of a certain actuarial value

→ PB: manage to people's needs, instead of managing to the money

5. The services and goods we require to ensure our rights must be financed equitably

- Equity in budget & revenue policy:
Vermont must raise and distribute resources in an equitable way, with particular attention to meeting the needs of those who are disadvantaged or vulnerable.
- Equity in healthcare financing policy:
Healthcare must be financed publicly and equitably through taxation.
- The principle of equity requires that the cost of financing public goods, including healthcare, must be shared equitably, which means that richer people — and more profitable companies — pay proportionately more than poorer people. Public financing through progressive taxation ensures that contributions are made based on ability to pay. User fees - in healthcare or other areas - have no role in equitable financing, as they shift the financial burden onto those with greater needs, rather than spreading the costs among all of us.

Example: The National Health Service in the United Kingdom

Access to NHS services is based on clinical need, not an individual's ability to pay.

NHS services are free of charge, except in limited circumstances sanctioned by Parliament. [...] The NHS is a national service funded through national taxation.

(Source: NHS Constitution)

Our policy positions:

- HCHR: equitable financing through progressive taxation, guided by health needs
- PB: revenue must be raised in an equitable way, guided by a needs-based budget

6. The paradigm shift: starting with needs, and funding those in an effective and equitable way

Our healthcare system must be funded through equitable taxes, along with all other public services and programs. Funding should be appropriated based on health needs and the cost of services to meet those needs. An independent regulatory body, using a participatory public process, should assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the use of funds in meeting health needs and improving population health. This process of assessing needs, mobilizing public funds through equitable taxes, and taking decisions in a participatory and accountable way about how to raise and use public funds effectively, according to the scope and depth of need, should apply to our budget & revenue process as a whole.