

The Human Right to Healthcare

Human rights are what we all need to live our lives with dignity. We come together and form governments in order to fulfill our human rights. Healthcare is a human right. This means that our government is responsible for guaranteeing healthcare and all our human rights as public goods. But we know that our rights are never handed to us. History teaches us that we only claim our rights through organizing and struggle.

We use these five principles to describe what we mean when we say that healthcare is a human right and to assess whether our healthcare system protects all of our human rights.

Universality: All Vermont residents are included in our healthcare system and are guaranteed the care they need.

Equity: We finance our healthcare system through taxes based on income so that everyone pays according to their ability. Our healthcare system eliminates discrimination and barriers to care.

Accountability: People are able to oversee and guide our healthcare system, and to hold the government accountable for protecting and fulfilling our right to healthcare.

Transparency: All information related to decision-making is clear and accessible to all. People know how public institutions that protect our right to healthcare are managed and run.

Participation: People have a meaningful say in decisions about how our right to healthcare is ensured.

In 2011 Vermont passed Act 48, Vermont's Universal and Unified Healthcare law. It affirms Vermont's commitment to these human rights principles by stating:

“The state of Vermont must ensure universal access to and coverage for high-quality, medically necessary health services for all Vermonters. Systemic barriers, such as cost, must not prevent people from accessing necessary health care. All Vermonters must receive affordable and appropriate health care at the appropriate time in the appropriate setting.”

“The health care system must be transparent in design, efficient in operation, and accountable to the people it serves. The state must ensure public participation in the design, implementation, evaluation, and accountability mechanisms of the health care system.”

“The financing of health care in Vermont must be sufficient, fair, predictable, transparent, sustainable, and shared equitably.”

To meet these principles, Vermont must provide healthcare as a public good, not as a commodity or source of profit-making.