Brattleboro Reformer

Grant funded initiative seeks sustainability for regional birthing services

By Chris Mays, Brattleboro Reformer, 09/24/26

BRATTLEBORO — A new grant will help Brattleboro Memorial Hospital and other hospitals, community health organizations, social service providers and other regional partners plan for the future of maternity and newborn care in Southeast Vermont.

BMH said it received $3.1 million in Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP) funding to lead the regional effort to develop "a sustainable model" for delivering the services. Hospitals apply for the federal grant through the states.

Groups will come together as the Southeast Vermont Perinatal & Newborn Access Network to explore options, according to a news release. The network was proposed as part of the grant application.

“This grant gives us an important opportunity to take a regional approach to a challenge that no single organization can solve on its own,” Dr. Elizabeth McLarney and Dr. Tony Blofson, acting co-CEOs of BMH, said in the news release. “Our goal is to ensure that families throughout Southeast Vermont have reliable access to high-quality maternity and newborn care, while developing a model that is sustainable for the long term.”

BMH said it runs "Southeast Vermont’s only remaining hospital-based birthing center." A recent plan to close the center due to financial challenges was reversed earlier this month. The BMH Board of Directors affirmed its commitment to continuing obstetric and birthing services, thanks in part to the funding.

Hospital leadership developed an improvement plan that includes operational efficiencies, staffing changes, increased appointment availability, improved coding and charge capture, and efforts to increase the number of births delivered at BMH, according to the announcement. The hospital also anticipates an increase in expected births in updated fiscal year 2026 projects.

“The board believes strongly that access to local maternity care is essential to the health and well-being of our community,” Chloe Learey, chairwoman of the BMH Board of Directors, previously said. “We are encouraged by the progress that has been made and by the opportunity to continue improving how we deliver care.”

BMH also plans to continue working with state and federal legislators on payment reform and potential models to strengthen the hospital’s financial stability, including exploration of Critical Access Hospital and Federally Qualified Health Center models.

The grant funded planning initiative will look at "a range of potential models, including shared staffing and services among regional hospitals, coordinated regional birthing services, and community-based prenatal, postpartum, and newborn care," according to the news release. BMH said the process doesn't fund direct patient care or provide an operating subsidy for the BMH Birthing Center but will "support regional service and workforce assessments, financial sustainability analysis, referral and transfer planning, transportation-access planning, and development of a future-state care model."

“We are intentionally not starting with a predetermined answer,” McLarney and Blofson said. “We need to look carefully at the needs of families, the availability of providers, workforce challenges, and the financial realities of rural healthcare. This work will help us determine what model can best serve our region over the long term.”

BMH said the project also will involve collaboration with Cheshire Medical Center/Dartmouth Health in New Hampshire and Baystate Franklin in Massachusetts on regional consultation, referral, and transfer pathways.

Running through July 31, 2027, the 10-month planning initiative is anticipated to culminate in a regional care-model blueprint, financial sustainability analysis and five-year regional implementation plan.

“This is an investment in the future of health care in Southeast Vermont,” McLarney and Blofson said. “We are grateful for the opportunity to work with our regional partners to develop a sustainable system of care for the families we serve.”

Work on the initiative is anticipated to start around Oct. 1.

https://www.reformer.com/local-news/grant-funded-initiative-seeks-sustainability-for-regional-birthing-services/article_44e8724d-865b-4b32-a1b1-486bb3e8ec34.html