



As Brattleboro hospital inks two new union contracts, attention now turns to survival

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Howard Weiss-Tisman / Vermont Public

Brattleboro Memorial is projected to lose \$14.5 million this year, and the hospital is now getting ready to submit its projected budget for next year, which is due July 1.

After narrowly avoiding two potential strikes, Brattleboro Memorial Hospital is preparing for what could be a pivotal budget review later this summer.

It's been a difficult year for the small southern Vermont hospital.

During last year's budget hearings, state regulators rejected the hospital's proposed 2026 budget because the numbers were not accurate.

The hospital's revised budget showed a \$14.5 million deficit, and the CEO parted ways with the organization shortly after.

Brattleboro Memorial also spent months locked in contract negotiation talks with the nurses' union, with the nurses threatening to strike.

The union eventually inked a two-year deal in April, but the hospital faced another strike threat from a different union representing support staff and technical workers. On May 14, that union announced a two-year agreement, which is the first union contract for the 280 support staff at Brattleboro Memorial.

The workers agreed to a new wage scale, and also won stronger health and safety protections, including a staffed metal detector at the entrance to the hospital.

Acting co-CEO Dr. Elizabeth McLarney said the hospital administration is eager to move beyond the difficult contract talks.

"Negotiations are hard because we are now tasked with looking out for the fiscal solvency of the hospital," McLarney said. "So we're continuing to support our employees while moving forward in keeping the hospital solvent."

McLarney said it was too early in the fiscal year to provide an update on the hospital's deficit, though she said they have made some improvements with the billing and payment problems that led to lost revenue in the past.

McLarney also noted that the hospital hadn't budgeted for the pay increases it provided as part of the recently signed union contracts, and it's facing other cost increases.

And on top of working on initiatives to slow down the deficit this year, Brattleboro Memorial must now turn its attention toward preparing a proposed budget for next year, which is due on July 1.

And state regulators this year have set very tight budget guidelines to curb spending and price increases.

The Green Mountain Care Board is asking hospitals to keep their spending and prices 1% below this year, while only allowing a 2.4% increase in operating expenses.

McLarney said it will be very hard for Brattleboro Memorial Hospital to meet the tight budget guidelines.

"We're working very hard on decreasing our expenses, but we're seeing those same increased prices for supplies, fuel, utilities," McLarney said. "So, to be held to a minus-one-percent expense decrease is going to be tough."

The hospital board is also conducting a nationwide search for the next CEO.

McLarney has been acting co-CEO along with Dr. Tony Blofson, and the two doctors will continue in those roles until a new CEO is hired.

<https://www.vermontpublic.org/local-news/2026-05-21/as-brattleboro-hospital-inks-two-new-union-contracts-attention-now-turns-to-survival>

