

PHILIP B. SCOTT
Governor



State of Vermont
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

January 12, 2018

The Honorable Eric Hargan
Acting Secretary of U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Opioid addiction is devastating communities across our country and in our state of Vermont. As the President's Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis stated in its final report, drug overdoses are now the leading cause of unintentional deaths. In response, the President has declared the opioid crisis a public health emergency. An important step in addressing this crisis, and one supported by the President's Commission, is increasing access to treatment, including medication-assisted treatment (MAT). In that spirit, I am writing you today to ask that we expand our existing state and federal partnership by including Medicare as a participating payer in Vermont's nationally-recognized "Hub and Spoke" opioid addiction system of treatment, as well as for Vermont providers offering complementary prevention, diagnosis, and recovery activities.

The state of Vermont and federal government have been effective partners in health care reform for many years. Vermont has been provided the flexibility and tools to improve the delivery of health care and by extension the health and well-being of Vermonters. Vermont's *Global Commitment to Health* Medicaid 1115 waiver and the *Vermont All-Payer Accountable Care Organization Model Agreement* are examples of how the federal government and a state can design a program that furthers federal goals while being customized for the strengths and needs of an individual State.

Given the urgency of opioid abuse, the state of Vermont would like to further our partnership with CMS by requesting that CMS consider Medicare's participation in Vermont's Hub and Spoke program. This highly praised opioid addiction treatment program has since its launch in 2013 increased access to MAT for thousands of Vermonters. Through coordinated team-based care, it seeks to provide the necessary level of care in the most appropriate settings. Furthermore, MAT is viewed as a gold standard in opioid use disorder treatment and has been associated with reduced medical expenditures in a Medicaid population. Early analysis indicates this pattern could be repeated with Medicare beneficiaries. While Hub and Spoke services to date have been primarily supported by Medicaid, this epidemic does not discriminate against age or socioeconomic status, and Medicare beneficiaries are a growing cohort of Americans overcome by this crisis. Medicare participation in Hub and Spoke would improve Vermont's ability to provide necessary care to the Medicare beneficiaries who need it.

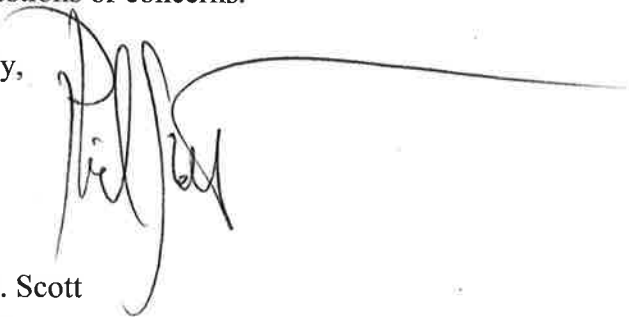
The Honorable Eric Hargan
January 12, 2018
Page Two

The *Vermont All-Payer Accountable Care Organization Model Agreement* could serve as a platform for the state and CMS to involve Medicare. This novel and forward-thinking model grants Vermont significant flexibility to integrate care across the health care and social services system and across payers. It also holds Vermont accountable to statewide performance targets such as reducing deaths attributed to substance abuse, expanding access to treatment, and improving early intervention.

Vermont is also exploring all-payer approaches to prevention, non-opioid management of chronic pain, and identification of individuals with risky substance use behavior, as well as treatment for opioid use disorder. Many of these efforts are reflected in the recent recommendations by the Opioid Coordination Council I established at the beginning of my administration. As this work matures, additional opportunities for partnership between Vermont and the federal government are likely to arise. Vermont has made great strides in increasing prevention and access to care with Medicaid and state funds; but to truly tackle the opioid crisis, we need an “all hands on deck” approach coordinated across local, state, and federal partners. Together, I believe that we can demonstrate how an effective state and federal collaboration can serve communities torn apart by the opioid crisis.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me or my staff with questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Philip B. Scott
Governor

PBS/kp

c: Administrator Seema Verma, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services