

VtPHI Advisory Board

October 15, 2025

Attending: Laural, Sally, Heidi K, Steve, Richard, Molly, Joanne, Heidi W, Dan, Denise, Ron

Steve Ridini spoke of the national and regional challenges facing PHIs, noting that regional collaborations are being to form, particularly in New England and the far west, noting that they are just beginning to form. Primary issues connect with vaccine accessibility and distribution, and toward authentic community engagement to support policy systems changes. On the “good news” front he noted that philanthropy has begun showing more interest in public health, especially around the public health workforce. Some discussion of Community Health Workers. Steve referenced a recent article from APHA [“Advancing the Study of Power: Opportunities and Priorities for Understanding Population Health Inequities,” American Journal of Public Health.](#)

Heidi Klein reviewed the “main elements” of our contract with UVM’s Justice Research Center as a “thought partner” for UVM’s participation in the Prison Research and Innovation Network. Work began in the Springfield Prison several years ago, and will soon expand to the facility in Rutland as part of a partnership contract between UVM and the Department of Corrections. The heart of the work is research with both staff and inmates to inform policy and procedures not only within prisons but with external communities who both “send” inmates and later receive people back into communities at the completion of their sentences.

Dan Olson told of the formation of an informal Advocacy Roundtable which convenes people from a variety of advocacy efforts united in defense of public health, which includes both individuals and organizations like the Vermont Public Health Association and Institute. UVM’s Jon Schaffer, a sociologist, participates as well as former Vermont Department of Health who have coalesced under the banner of SOS (Save our Science).

Sally Kerschner then described the Defend Public Health effort (also a part of the Advocacy Roundtable), which began organizing over the summer, who will leave a rally on Friday at the State House to deliver a petition to Governor Scott encouraging his advocacy for public health at all levels.

“Around the Room” discussion about public health in Vermont today:

- Heidi W noted that there is a lot of energy with the feds around Health Information Exchanges; can we come at public health through this lens. Others commented that the state's focus in planning for the federal budget's allocation of \$100 million to states for each of five years has been around support licensed health care professionals to continue to care for rural populations
- Laural said her impression of what's happening in Vermont is that people are doing their work "in spite of" what is happening at the national level
- Denise concurred noting "we're doing the work because that's what we need to do?"
- Ron wondered if there is a role for the Institute in looking at Community Health Workers, and Molly noted that the deployment and use of CHWs is strong in both Oregon and California