



**For Immediate Release**

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***COVID Support VT Granted Extension to Promote Vermonters' Resilience and Well-Being***

**MONTPELIER**, VT (June 23, 2021) - Amid nation-leading vaccination rates and an end to the state of emergency, the coronavirus pandemic is entering a new phase in Vermont. As re-engagement brings new challenges to Vermonters' mental health and well-being, COVID Support VT is pleased to announce it has been granted a six-month extension to continue through December — enabling access to support as Vermonters grapple with the stress of re-opening uncertainties and ambiguity.

The federally funded crisis-counseling program has operated throughout the pandemic to support Vermonters' resilience, self-care and emotional wellness through free one-on-one counseling, workshops, education, and outreach to at-risk populations.

"Mental health experts are sharing concern about increased mental health challenges fueled by COVID-related stressors such as isolation and increased stress," says Interagency Planning Director Cheryle Wilcox of the Vermont Department of Mental Health. "In Vermont we're seeing these effects acutely, especially among our youth. We're at a critical point and it is important that we support Vermonters' emotional resilience and connections to each other to help alleviate a worsening wave of mental-health challenges. COVID Support VT is a crucial part of our state's mental-health response."

Alex Karambelas, who has been a support counselor and workshop facilitator with COVID Support VT since it started in July 2020, steps up to the position of project manager for the extension period. She succeeds Cathy Aikman, who directed the program in its first year.

"Americans across the country are feeling high levels of stress around reopening, and Vermonters are no exception," Karambelas says. "At COVID Support VT, we continue to see increased anxiety related to the ongoing pandemic, the ambiguity of loosening restrictions, economic hardships, and the transition to a new normal. It's important that we all continue to support each other, and especially those who are most vulnerable."

***Free Programming for All Vermonters***

COVID Support VT's programming is free for all Vermonters, with a goal of reaching those most at risk for pandemic-related mental health challenges. These include children, youth and families; people who were displaced from their positions to manage COVID-19; front-line staff, first responders and other essential workers; people experiencing societal inequities, and people who are isolated or lonely, including the elderly

and disabled. Economic pressures resulting from changes in or loss of employment, such as housing and food insecurity, exacerbate pandemic stress in vulnerable groups.

The grant extension will expand the current programming COVID Support VT provides, to encompass:

- Free, confidential one-on-one sessions with support counselors (via Vermont's 2-1-1 system, option #2), who are specially trained to provide emotional support, wellness and self-care strategies, and connection to community resources.
- Free virtual workshops and support groups on topics such as re-entry anxiety, parenting, compassion fatigue, and wellness.
- Monthly town halls on timely topics such as housing, food insecurity, or getting outdoors in Vermont.
- Community-partnered programs for BIPOC and New American/refugee communities.
- A comprehensive website that serves as a gateway to authoritative, scientifically vetted resources and information, with one-click translation of most everything into nearly 100 languages.
- Expanded in-person community services by support counselors as re-opening allows, such as outreach to migrant farm workers and nursing home residents.
- Assistance with applications for social services such as housing and food assistance.

COVID Support VT works in concert with the state's existing mental-health system of community-based mental health agencies via Vermont Care Partners (VCP).

"Vermont Care Partners is thrilled to see the COVID Support VT program continue to help Vermonters navigate the lingering impacts of the COVID-19 virus," says Simone Rueschemeyer, executive director of Vermont Care Network/Vermont Care Partners. "We have all been through a lot and it is still common to feel anxious, fearful, and lonely. As we re-engage with one another, open businesses fully, and begin to again enjoy all that our beautiful state has to offer, let's continue to reach out and support one another. COVID Support VT and all of the community mental health centers in Vermont are here to help."

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## Need to talk?

Call 2-1-1 (option #2) or 866-652-4636 (option #2) for free, confidential, one-on-one counseling. Our support counselors are available Monday – Friday.

## In crisis?

If you or someone you care for is experiencing thoughts of suicide or self-harm, you can: call the National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-800-273-825; text VT to 741741 to connect with a crisis counselor 24/7; connect with [your local community mental health agency](#) for 24/7 support.

## Find help

Find resources and tools for coping with stress at [www.COVIDSupportVT.org](http://www.COVIDSupportVT.org). Follow COVID Support VT on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#). And, to stay up-to-date, sign up for our [newsletter](#) and [blog](#).

Learn about upcoming [Wellness Workshops](#) from COVID Support VT, and [Town Halls](#) we're hosting in partnership with community organizations.

One-click translation to 100 languages of most everything on the [COVIDSupportVT.org](https://COVIDSupportVT.org) website, plus [Multilingual Resources](#) & downloadable materials in 10 languages common to Vermont's New American immigrant and refugee communities.

COVID Support VT is funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and Federal Emergency Management Agency, managed by Vermont's Department of Mental Health, and administered by [Vermont Care Partners](#), a statewide network of 16 non-profit community-based agencies providing mental health, substance use, and intellectual and developmental disability services and supports.

### **About COVID Support VT**

COVID Support VT offers assistance through education, emotional support, and connections to community services that promote resilience, empowerment, and recovery. The program is administered by the Vermont Department of Mental Health, Vermont Care Partners, and in conjunction with other community services in our State. Grant funded by FEMA.

Learn more at <https://covidsupportvt.org/> or look for COVID Support VT on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter.

### **About Vermont Care Partners (VCP)**

VCP is a statewide network of community-based agencies providing mental health, substance use, and intellectual and developmental disability services and supports. VCP agencies support Vermonters to lead healthy, safe, and satisfying lives community by community. Learn more at <https://vermontcarepartners.org/>.

### **About Vermont Department of Mental Health (DMH)**

DMH resides under the Agency of Human Services and has the same critical mission in mind: to improve the conditions and well-being of Vermonters and protect those who cannot protect themselves. The individuals and families that DMH supports in Vermont's communities want the same things we all want; safe homes, close friends, loving relationships, good health, and something meaningful to do each day. Our job is to help them succeed. Learn more at <https://mentalhealth.vermont.gov>.