


Children with Special Health Needs (CSHN) Connection January 2026

AHS - VDH CSHN

8 min read

Dear Colleagues and Community Partners,

January feels like standing on the cusp of time - reflecting on what and where we have been while also looking forward to what will be and where we want to go. January is a moment of learning from our past and holding space for our potential. We can do this reflection personally and as an organization.

Over the course of the last year, Children with Special Health Needs has made partnering with families and listening to family voice a priority across our programs. Our intention for 2026 is to build on the work of the past year and expand the opportunities for families to inform our work and join us in improving CSHN systems. CSHN has always been strongly family-centered, but this past year we began to take more seriously our desire to learn from and honor the value of family's lived experience and to allow families of children and youth with special health needs to take on roles that contribute to improving our programs and services. We have an active and engaged group of families that meet with us regularly and take on various tasks for the organization.

Beginning this year, the CSHN Connection newsletter will include contributions from our family partners and families will be able to receive the newsletter directly to their email inboxes. We are excited to continue to invite families into our work. Their willingness to share wisdom, their honest reflection of challenges and successes, and their commitment to improving the system of care for all families is very appreciated and inspiring.

CSHN Connections Team

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Program Spotlight

CSHN Family Partners

The Family and Child Health Division continue to formalize and deepen the ways in which we engage and partner with families. Children with Special Health Needs (CSHN) has entered their second year of intentional partnership with approximately 25 families from across Vermont who are or have been enrolled in CSHN programs or services. Through our Family Partner Program, we are cultivating and strengthening relationships with families who have lived expertise and want to share their insight to improve programs, services, and systems.

CSHN Family Partners participate in a variety of ways including:

- *Attending a bi-monthly CSHN Family Partner meeting with CSHN staff
- *Sharing their stories during a Family and Child Health staff learning time
- *Engaging in a listening and learning session about genetic testing (featured below in Resources for Families)
- *Providing specific feedback and insight on various time-sensitive projects
- *Joining the CSHN Connection Newsletter team to help inform content

When asked to reflect on being part of the CSHN Family Partner program, families shared that the experience is:

- "Helpful and healing."
 - "Rewarding," "hopeful," and "fulfilling."
 - Providing a sense of being "valued," "heard," and part of something that helps other families.

Angela Davis wrote "It is in collectivities that we find reservoirs of hope and optimism."

We are so grateful to all of our Family Partners who have become part of our collectivity and helped us find hope and optimism.

Community Partner Spotlight



Nurse wearing blue scrubs talking to student wearing orange sweater, seated at table.

Community Partner Spotlight: **School Nurses**

School nurses are vital members of the school community and key partners in supporting children with special health needs. As registered nurses working in school districts, they sit at the intersection of health, wellness, and education, helping ensure students are safe, healthy, and ready to learn. School nurses collaborate closely with students, families, educators, and healthcare providers to develop and carry out individualized health and education plans, including IEPs and 504 plans. Through this work, they help children meet important health milestones and remove health-related barriers to learning.

In schools, nurses provide daily care and education, helping students build independence in managing conditions such as asthma, diabetes, seizures, and allergies. They create and oversee asthma, seizure, and allergy action plans; support emergency planning; and ensure procedures and medications are administered safely during the school day. School nurses also play a critical role in prevention and population health by conducting vision and hearing screenings, monitoring immunization compliance, managing infectious disease outbreaks, and training school staff on student health needs. Many are involved in health education, environmental health initiatives like air and water quality assessments, and community programs such as 802 Smiles. By identifying health trends and advocating for students, school nurses help create safer, healthier school environments where all children can thrive.

CSHN Updates



Test tubs filled with blue liquid and DNA molecules.

A Message from Health Commissioner Rick Hildebrant, MD: [Vaccines Do Not Cause Autism](#)

What We Know about the Causes of Autism

It's natural to have questions, especially when making decisions about your child's health.

- Vaccines do not cause autism. This has been confirmed by more than 20 years of research. The original claim linking vaccines and autism has been disproven and retracted.
- Autism starts very early in brain development and is strongly influenced by genetics and certain environmental factors – not vaccines.
- Vaccines are among the most closely tested and monitored medical tools we have.

What we're still learning: Scientists are continuing to study all the possible causes of autism. But we know vaccines are not one of them.

Where to Find Trustworthy Information

Some websites and social media posts share false or misleading claims. These can increase worry and confusion, especially for parents trying to make the best choices for their children.

- For reliable, up-to-date information on vaccine safety, visit [Vaccine Safety](#) | Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.
- For information about autism causes, signs and symptoms, visit [What Causes Autism](#) | [Autism Speaks](#) | [@AutismSpeaks](#)

Vaccine Guidance News: You may have heard that the CDC changed its vaccine recommendations for children. We want to be clear that Vermont's requirements and school-age recommendations have not changed. In Vermont, kids can still get vaccinated at their doctor's office or pharmacy as usual.

Visit HealthVermont.gov/VaccineInfo for the Health Department's recommendations and information.

Resources for Families



White donation box filled with sweaters. Stack of books next to box.

New Resource Alert

CSHN and Vermont Family Network teamed up to create [Navigating a Genetics Referral](#)—Information to help families with the medical and practical challenges following a referral. It contains information about what to expect from appointments and the care team as well as community and funding resources.

Winter Fun Time for Families:

Rutland County: [Wonderfeet Kids' Museum](#) Play and Support Group - It Takes a Village: A Community of Parents

- Mondays from 10:00-11:30am
- Free play, support group, connection, education, meet with other parents
- For updates, check their [Facebook Page](#)

Windsor County: [Montshire Museum of Science Sensory Hour](#)

- February 21st, 9:00-10:00am, free
- Sensory Friendly Hours offer a quieter and less crowded visit with sensory support supplies.

Chittenden County: [Petra Cliffs Climbing](#)

- Private adaptive lessons. Families can work directly with Petra Cliffs or you can work with Green Mountain Adaptive through their [Indoor Rock Climbing](#) program.

Northeast Kingdom: [Adaptive Sports Partners](#)

- Has a variety of adaptive equipment for every activity and season
- Alpine Skiing and Snowboarding (Burke Mountain, Jay Peak), Swimming –(St. Johnsbury Academy, Bowling (Gold Crown Lanes in St. Johnsbury)

Statewide: [Green Mountain Adaptive Sports](#) – associated fees listed on each activity site with scholarship/financial assistance available

- [Swimming](#) – Burlington, White River Junction, Berlin, Stowe
- [Adaptive Nordic Ski Program](#) – Craftsbury
- [Tetraski and Snow'kart](#) – Stowe (independent skiing for people with complex disabilities)

Statewide: [Vermont Adaptive Ski & Sports](#) – works with several resorts and outdoor centers statewide to offer individualized activities for youth and adults with disabilities

- Reservations are required for all lessons and outings through Vermont Adaptive online (will not accept requests over the phone, email, text, etc.) and reservations must be made 14 days in advanced.

From **Help Me Grow:**

WANT TO HELP YOUR CHILD LEARN AND GROW?
The Basics Offers Insights and Tips to Support Child Learning and Development

Sign up to receive **The Basics**—science-based facts and activities that boost your child's learning and brain development from birth through age 5.

RECEIVE THREE FREE MESSAGES EACH WEEK!

SCAN HERE TO SIGN UP

Point your phone camera at the QR code
Click on the link that appears

The Basics Principles are 5 fun, simple, and powerful ways that every family can give every child a great start in life.

- Maximize Love, Manage Stress
- Talk, Sing, and Point
- Count, Group, and Compare
- Explore Through Movement and Play
- Read and Discuss Stories

The Basics Vermont
thebasics.org

Help Me Grow Vermont

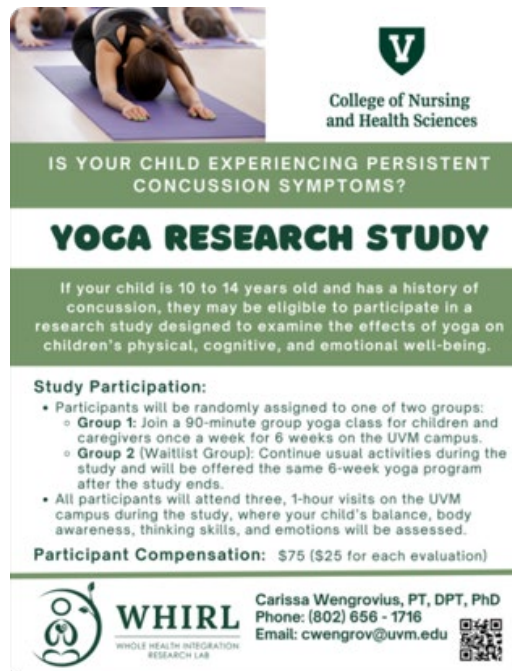
Let's Get Started!

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/actearly
1-800-CDC-INFO

Registration Link: <https://partners.mybliss.ai/basics-insights/VDOHB18122?langName=en>

White background flyer with multi colored mostly orange icons and QR code for more info.

UVM College of Nursing and Health Sciences Study



Green font on white background flyer advertising yoga research study for youth.

Love Your Brain Summit

Along with the above survey, want to remind providers about Vermont's LoveYourBrain Foundation's annual Summit March 20-22, 2026 online. This summit introduces emerging therapies and research to the brain injury community. This foundation is a leader in research and science about holistic healing modalities for brain injury. For more information, see their Summit website: [LoveYourBrain Summit](#).

Special Education Advisory Panel Seeks New Members

The Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP) is required in each state under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This panel is currently in need of several roles to be filled including teachers, a representative of state agency involved in financing or delivery of related services, and multiple parents of students with disabilities (under the age of 26) as well as an individual living with a disability. For more information, please visit the State Special Education Advisory Panel website <https://education.vermont.gov/state-board-councils/special-education-advisory-panel> for more details. Contact: Katie Ballard at katie.ballardvt@gmail.com

Want to reach the **CSHN Care Consultant** for your area? Local contact info is available on our website: [CSHN Service Area](#).

Please consider sharing these resources with the families you serve and others at your organizations.

Policy Corner



Youth sitting in chair, writing in notebook at school desk.

Vermont Policy Updates

Medicaid ABA Billing Changes

Beginning with dates of service January 1, 2026, VT Medicaid ABA service billing began undergoing changes to align with federal and state billing guidelines. Please refer to this website for information regarding these changes: [Clinical Practice Guidelines | Department of Vermont Health Access](#)

GCR 25-085 Final: **Vermont Medicaid ended the Next Generation (VMNG) Accountable Care Organization (ACO) Program** effective January 1, 2026. A detailed description can be found at [GCR 25-085](#).

GCR 25-102 Final: **Durable Medicaid Equipment – Prior Authorization**. Vermont Medicaid program is reinstating prior authorization for durable medical equipment, prosthetics, orthotics, and supplies that exceed limits. This policy became effective on December 1, 2025. Please read the GCR for more information. [GCR 25-102](#).

GCR 26-032 Final: [Green Mountain Care Financial Eligibility Standards](#) is posted, effective January 1, 2026. This notification of 20206 Protected Income Level (PIL) and Federal Poverty Level (PFL) is an annual update to financial thresholds for eligibility standards for Green Mountain Care programs, now available on the Vermont Health Connect website.

And finally, no pun intended, Final policies 25-050 to 25-055 **Health Benefits Eligibility and Enrollment (HBEE) Rules Update** are posted online. These took effect January 1, 2026.

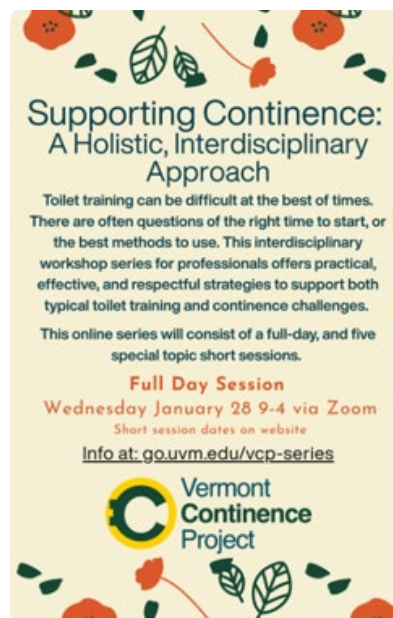
The Agency of Human Services has filed the following adopted rules with the Legislative Committee on Administrative Rulemaking (LCAR) and the Secretary of State for the following parts of the [Health Benefits Eligibility and Enrollment \(HBEE\) rule](#):

- Part 1 – General Provisions and Definitions
- Part 2 – Eligibility Standards
- Part 3 – Nonfinancial Eligibility Requirements
- Part 4 – Special Rules for Medicaid Coverage of Long-Term Care Services and Supports – Eligibility and Post-Eligibility
- Part 5 – Financial Methodologies
- Part 7 – Eligibility-and-Enrollment Procedures

Detailed descriptions can be found at the link provided above.

If you have questions about any of the GCRs above or wish to be added to **email notifications for Global Commitment waivers** please email AHS.MedicaidPolicy@vermont.gov.

Community Happenings



Upcoming workshop series provided by Vermont Continence Project. See go.uvm.edu/vcp-series for details and registration.

“Preparing Augmentative Alternative Communication (ACC) User for Transition: Tips and Tools” - January 29 1:00-2:00pm

For young people with disabilities, there are many moving pieces and processes around the transition from school to adult services. There are unique needs for those with communication disabilities who may use augmentative alternative communication (AAC) systems. Being thoughtful, intentional and systematic about the communication support needs of the individual who is transitioning can increase the chances of their being included in a meaningful way. Presenters: Ashley Couture, MS, CCC-SLP and Theresa Soares, parent. [Register for 1/29: Preparing Augmentative Alternative Communication \(AAC\) Users for Transition: Tips and Tools! - Vermont Family Network](#)

Check out the [Special Needs Support Center Calendar](#) for events from numerous disability organizations in the Upper Valley.

Penguin Plunge by Special Olympics Vermont is coming up on Saturday February 7, 2026 11am at the Burlington Waterfront. See [website](#) for more info, registration, or donation.

Vermont Family Network is kicking off **Tween SibShops** at the end of this month. Tween SibShops are designed exclusively for youth ages 11–15 who have a sibling with special health needs. These workshops create a space just for them—supporting tweens as they navigate this unique stage of life, with encouragement from peers and guidance from Vermont Family Network staff.

First activity is January 23, 2026 from 6-7:30pm at Spare Time in Colchester. If you're interested in participating, fill out this [Tween SibShop Registration Survey!](#) If you have questions or want to know about future events, email sarah.morgart@vtfn.org.


For other activities for children with disabilities, check out [Kayla's Directory](#) events calendar.

CSHN supports children with complex, chronic health conditions and/or developmental disorders, ages birth to-21, and their families, with flexible, experienced, and proactive services. If you'd like to learn more about CSHN programming and resources, please see the [CSHN Website](#).

Do you have feedback or content for this newsletter? Please [let us know!](#)



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