

525 Clinton Street
Bow, NH 03304
Voice: 603-228-2830
Fax: 603-228-2464



61 Elm Street
Montpelier, VT 05602
Voice: 802-229-0002
Fax: 802-223-2336

www.bistatepca.org

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Contact: Georgia Maheras – 857-234-5171 (cell), gmaheras@bistatepca.org

Bi-State Primary Care Association Announces New Position Dedicated to Food Access – 6.23.21

Bi-State Primary Care Association is pleased to announce the creation of a new position dedicated to food access at our organization. Effective July 1st, Helen Labun will be leaving her role as Director of Vermont Public Policy to become our first manager for Food Access in Health Care.

Over the last year, Helen has worked with partners in health care, food, and food access, to map the opportunities for integrating food as part of health care in our state. Vermont has many promising projects in this area. Nationally we also see a flourishing of models built from strong clinical evidence, demonstrated cost-effectiveness, and partnerships across sectors. At the same time, the dramatic rise in food insecurity during COVID-19 made clear the weaknesses in our current systems and the need to support better strategies to address this issue in the years ahead.

In 2021, Bi-State was awarded an HRSA Rural Health Care Services Outreach Grant that will fund pilot projects in food and heart health at three rural Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), as well as network-building around food as a clinical intervention. This grant is an important complement to our planning and policy work, allowing Bi-State to support project implementation and share lessons learned.

“Food access has been at the heart of the FQHC model since its beginning – the first FQHC included its community farm. As our approach to health care has evolved, so have the opportunities for integrating food as part of our services. We are pleased to be able to dedicate a full-time position to navigating the innovative world of food in health care,” said Tess Kuenning, President and CEO.

“Coming to Bi-State originally from a background in food and agriculture, I knew that what we eat is an important part of health and that many people face barriers to that healthy diet. Re-examining that equation from the perspective of the Public Policy Director at Bi-State, I have a greater appreciation for the many different ways food can be incorporated into addressing a range of health conditions. Through my health care policy experience, I have gained a valuable perspective on the steps required to make the systemwide changes that will help us meet the goals of improved health outcomes, better patient experience, effective collaboration both within care teams and across community organizations, and lower total costs of care. I’m excited to take on this new challenge,” said Helen Labun.

Bi-State will be looking for ongoing opportunities to build the frameworks that support food access as part of health care statewide and to assist practices as they grow their food-focused programs.

Bi-State Primary Care Association (Bi-State) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, formed by two health and social service leaders in 1986 to expand access to health care in Vermont and New Hampshire. Today, Bi-State represents 31 member organizations across both states that provide comprehensive primary care services to over 300,000 patients at 142 locations. Our members include Federally-Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), clinics for the uninsured, rural health clinics, Area Health Education Center programs, and Planned Parenthood of Northern New England.

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