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## AWARDS HONOR SIX RESIDENTS FOR IMPROVING ACCESS TO PRIMARY CARE FOR VERMONTERS

VERMONT – MAY 31, 2023 – At Bi-State Primary Care Association’s annual Primary Care Conference at Lake Morey Resort in Fairlee, Vermont, six Vermonters were nominated by their peers and selected by Bi-State’s Board of Directors to receive an award. Since the Bi-State Awards were established in 1996, 205 individuals have been recognized for their remarkable contributions towards improving access to primary and preventive health care services for underserved and rural populations in Vermont and New Hampshire. The video recording of the Awards Ceremony is available on [Bi-State’s YouTube channel](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdwCPG1yUEY). (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdwCPG1yUEY>).

**Bi-State’s Board of Directors Chair Award** honors individuals who have made outstanding contributions to Bi-State’s mission to ensure access to health care for vulnerable populations. Maria Mercedes Avila, Ph.D., Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Vermont, Larner College of Medicine, is a health equity scholar specializing in social determinants of health and national CLAS Standards to advance health equity. Dr. Avila has provided extensive research on justice, diversity, equity, and inclusion and has worked with refugee, immigrant, and Native Indigenous communities.

**The Outstanding Clinician Award** honors primary care clinicians whose exemplary skills and service have made a significant impact on the health of underserved patients and the communities in which they serve. Anje Van Berckelaer, MD, Co-Executive Director and Clinical Director at Battenkill Valley Health Center (BVHC) in Arlington, Vermont, has dedicated her life to caring for the underserved, including serving as a Peace Corps volunteer and with Doctors without Borders. At BVHC, she sees patients two days per week, oversees the quality department, and supports clinical staff.

**The Public Service Award** honors individuals whose position allows them to make extraordinary contributions in public health and primary care access. Lauren Hibbert, Vermont Deputy Secretary of State, and Lauren Layman, General Counsel of the Vermont Office of Professional Regulation, led the process of overseeing the rapid expansion of telehealth necessary to meet patient needs in Vermont. Ms. Layman and Ms. Hibbert brought together a diverse group of stakeholders and shaped their recommendations into a coherent policy that balanced patient access, patient safety, provider burden, and funding requirements. The result was a policy that broadened Vermonters’ access to health care providers out-of-state, while holding providers accountable for best practices and patient safety. Ms. Hibbert navigated the policy proposal through the Legislature quickly to ensure the new policy was in place before the existing emergency order expired.

**The Community Service Award** honors individuals whose volunteer efforts have made a significant impact on vulnerable populations. Michael Brandli, MS, CMHC, AAP, is a licensed clinical mental health and behavioral health clinician at Little Rivers Health Care. Mr. Brandli’s impact is widespread in the Little

Rivers catchment area: He provides priority counseling for first responders and veterans; Youth Mental Health First Aid training for mentors of the Upper Valley Mentor Program; Narcan training for the Groton Fire Department; and in-service training for teachers regarding Trauma-Informed Classrooms. Mr. Brandli offers Tai Chi classes at the local library and a series on Mindfulness for community members.

**The Hunt Blair Leadership Award** recognizes the potential every individual has to improve the lives of many, as demonstrated by the brilliance, tenacity, and vision of Hunt Blair. Kara Ellsworth, Practice Manager at Little Rivers Health Care, joined the health center as a patient services representative. She quickly mastered front desk operations and began training others. Just before the pandemic, Ms. Ellsworth created a unified culture that improved staff performance across all health centers. As practice manager, she has enhanced the revenue cycle, created synergies within the electronic medical records system, expanded the scope of the quality management program, and ensured all patients had access to care. Ms. Ellsworth has been a driving force in transforming Little Rivers Health Care.

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#### About Bi-State Primary Care Association

[Bi-State Primary Care Association](#) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that represents New Hampshire and Vermont's 28 Community Health Centers serving over 315,400 patients at 143 locations across every county in New Hampshire and Vermont. Bi-State works to promote access to quality affordable primary health care with an emphasis on reaching underserved populations. Bi-State was founded in 1986 as a 501©(3) charitable organization with offices in Bow, New Hampshire, and Montpelier, Vermont.