

Clinic aims to expand access

Proposed vending machine would have naloxone

OVERDOSE PREVENTION

By CLARE SHANAHAN

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WHITE RIVER JUNCTION — A nonprofit is petitioning the town of Hartford to install an outdoor vending machine that will offer the overdose-reversal medication naloxone and other health resources 24 hours a day.

Good Neighbor Health Clinic — a White River Junction-based provider offering free medical and dental care to people in need in the Upper Valley — will appear before the town’s Planning Commission Oct. 7 to petition for the project.

If it is approved, the clinic would install the “harm reduction” vending machine near the back door of their office in White River Junction as soon as they can order it and have it delivered. This may take one to three months, Elizabeth Austin, Good Neighbor’s executive director, said in a Tuesday interview.

The machine will be accessible 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year, according to documents submitted to the town. Good Neighbor will stock the machine with overdose prevention and substance abuse supplies such as naloxone, testing strips for different substances, syringe disposal containers and gun locks, as well as hygiene and sexual health products. All of the items will be available for free to anyone who needs them.

Austin said this project is in response to a “rising demand for essential health supplies among our community members,” and widespread staffing shortages in health care.

“Public health is a really important part of our mission, and we believe that this is an effective way to help meet the needs of our community,” Austin said.

One goal for this machine is to help prevent overdose deaths.

As of the end of June, there had been 90 opioid-related accidental and undetermined deaths in Vermont in 2024, which was below the three-year average. In New Hampshire, there have been 136 total overdose deaths as of July 11, which was a decrease from the same date in 2023.

Drug overdose deaths in New Hampshire steadily increased during the pandemic and then saw a decrease in 2023. In Vermont after a steady increase since 2019, the number of opioid related deaths also decreased from 2022 to 2023. This decrease coincides with national trends which show a drop in overdose deaths for the first time since 2020, but ex-

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Machine would dispense naloxone, other overdose prevention aids

perts say there is no clear cause for this trend. Some suggest it may be due to an increase in the availability of naloxone, a decrease in the availability of fentanyl or the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to

increased drug use nationwide.

In April, the Littleton, N.H.-based North Country Health Consortium installed a similar vending machine outside of their offices in Littleton that distributes free naloxone and is accessible at any time.

Since its installation, the machine has been a success, Annette Carbonneau, director of community health worker programs at the consortium, said, and she is working on installing a second machine in a different area.

Carbonneau said the consortium collects zip codes from people accessing products from the machine and they have documented that people from Northern Grafton County, Coos County and from other counties and states have used the resource.

Austin noted that Good Neighbor does not plan to collect any data from people who use the proposed machine.

“This is open to the public and it is accessible to anyone who needs these supplies. In order to promote health equity for us we really like to reduce the barriers in access to care,” she said.

Michael Redmond, executive director of Upper Valley Haven — a White River Junction- based organization providing temporary housing, educational resources and food to individuals in need — wrote a letter supporting the Good Neighbor application.

In the letter, Redmond said the Haven “works with many of the same patients using the GNHC clinics and (has) similar interest in their health and well-being.”

Redmond said in a Monday interview that, similar to Good Neighbor, the Haven distributes harm reduction resources including naloxone, fentanyl and xylazine test strips and condoms, but these things are only accessible during the week when the Haven’s main building and community food market are open.

“I applaud Good Neighbor for thinking about the population that uses their services,” Redmond said.

The vending machine is part of broader harm reduction services offered by Good Neighbor and builds on other projects in the area to increase access to resources such as naloxone.

The Lebanon Public Library has installed naloxoboxes — wall-mounted boxes that hold and distribute naloxone — outside its two locations, and the HIV/HCV Resource Center is working to get more of these boxes installed throughout the Upper Valley. The Resource Center also offers harm reduction services and operates a syringe exchange program.

In addition to distributing harm reduction resources,

the Haven has plans to construct a low-barrier homeless shelter and resource center to support people in need. A low-barrier shelter is open to anyone, including people who struggle with addiction.

The project was approved by the town in December 2023. At that time, Redmond told the Valley News that the Haven hoped to begin construction this summer.

On Monday, Redmond said that the Haven now hopes to begin construction next spring.

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A vending machine with the overdose-reversal drug naloxone outside the Mt. Eustis Commons building on Cottage Street in Littleton, N.H. The machine provides up to six free doses of naloxone at a time and is anonymous to use.

NORTH COUNTRY HEALTH CONSORTIUM PHOTOGRAPH

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