newfutures

SOLVING PROBLEMS THROUGH POLICY CHANGE



2026 Impact Report

We solve problems through policy change.

For nearly 30 years, New Futures has provided nonpartisan, evidence-based solutions to New Hampshire's health challenges. We work to build bridges among policymakers and secure the passage of laws that improve access to child care, children's mental health services, affordable health care, substance use treatment, and healthy aging supports, among other needed resources. Through policy change, we can ensure that social service programs and statewide systems work for everyone.

Pediatric residents meet with NH lawmakers during their annual advocacy training with New Futures.



New Futures staff pose with The Grapevine Family & Community Resource Center staff after a training for older adults focused on advocating for healthy aging.

Mission

New Futures works to improve the health and well-being of all Granite Staters through public policy change and civic empowerment.

Vision

New Futures envisions communities where public policies allow all New Hampshire residents equitable opportunities to live, work, and thrive.

Values

[HOW WE BUILD TRUST]

- Integrity
- Expertise
- Partnership
- Inclusion
- Respect

Letter from The President

Dear Friends,

In any state budget year, it is easy to get caught up in fiscal notes, amendments, and bill numbers. But behind every line item and piece of legislation is a **real** person — someone whose life will be directly impacted by the decisions being made by our policymakers in Concord. During the long days at the State House, this is something we never forget.

Because legislation is only impactful if it meets the needs of people on the ground, we must always ask: Who is being helped (or hurt)? What problem does this solve? What will this policy actually change?

Posing those questions, and ensuring lawmakers truly hear and *understand* the answers, takes coordination, preparation, and community.

This is why New Futures has reformatted our 2026 annual event into a full-day policy and advocacy conference. We recognized the need to support individuals across the advocacy continuum. Whether you are just finding your voice or have done this work for years, this gathering is a chance to meet peers with a common goal. It is a space to dive into complex issues, learn to be effective advocates, and work within coalitions. Ultimately, it is a day to come together and chart a path forward to improve the health and well-being of all Granite Staters. Because policy is personal, and our stories help policymakers understand the consequences of their decisions.

Your story matters to this work. To share your own experiences through our digital story collector, please scan the QR code.

Thank you for being part of this community and helping make our state a better place to live, work, and thrive.

Sincerely,

Michele D. Merritt

Michele D. Merritt
President

Scan or visit new-futures.org/share-your-story



Michele Merritt has overall leadership and management responsibility for New Futures.

Strategic Goals

IMPROVING THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF ALL NEW HAMPSHIRE RESIDENTS

Be a Trusted Leader and Expert

- Provide strategic, data-driven resources and policy expertise
- Advance organizational priorities and policy positions informed by impacted stakeholders
- Provide policymakers and community leaders with tools and support needed to advance policy change

Build Civic Leadership

- Educate, support, and mobilize impacted individuals to engage in the New Hampshire legislative process
- Leverage internal tools and expertise to improve the effectiveness of grassroots engagement efforts
- Build and maintain strong community relationships based upon mutual respect and integrity

Increase Public Awareness

- Provide accurate, timely, and compelling communications to stakeholders
- Utilize communications tools and strategic expertise to elevate issues and amplify voices
- Strengthen recognition of our work and impact

Advance Impactful Policy

- Build robust coalitions to advance targeted policy initiatives
- Develop comprehensive and strategic issue-based campaign plans
- Support policymakers in the research and drafting of legislation
- Leverage internal capacity in support of shared coalition priorities

Grow Resources

- Build philanthropic partnerships to advance our work
- Expand support offerings for partner organizations

Embrace Learning

- Regularly evaluate the impact of our programs
- Provide ongoing opportunities for the learning and growth of our staff, board, and volunteers

EARLY CHILDHOOD

Improving access to quality child care, strengthening families, and reducing adverse childhood experiences.



> My hands were tied. I couldn't find anywhere that would take her for a year.
>
> – LAQUISHA GEBHARD, NEW HAMPSHIRE MOM

Nowhere to Go

When Laquisha Gebhard moved to New Hampshire for a better career and a fresh start for her and her daughter, she did not expect access to child care to be the hurdle that set her family back.

Before settling in the Lakes Region, Laquisha secured a child care slot for her daughter, Ziannah. The two were building their new life in New Hampshire when a serious car accident set off a cascade of challenges — including the unexpected news that her daughter was being expelled from her child care center.

"My hands were tied," said Laquisha. "I couldn't find anywhere that would take her for a year."

Laquisha was forced to quit the job she had relocated for and drop out of her classes at Lakes Region Community College. She picked up residential cleaning opportunities to make ends meet, bringing her daughter along. The stability she had worked to build was crumbling.

Laquisha's story is not unique. It reflects the growing financial strain on child care providers across New Hampshire. Too often, providers lack the resources to hire the additional staff needed to support a child with complex behaviors or developmental delays — leaving expulsion as a last resort and cutting children off from critical time building the social, emotional, and academic foundations that set the stage for success in kindergarten and beyond.

Fortunately, Laquisha was connected to Lakes Region Community Services, which helped secure an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for Ziannah. Today, Ziannah is enrolled in a part-time pre-K program, receiving specialized speech services, and thriving.

Not every family finds their way to a resource like Lakes Region Community Services. Right now, New Hampshire doesn't systematically track why or how often children are expelled from child care, which means the state can't direct resources to the root causes, whether that's behavioral health support, speech services, or additional staff training.

In 2027, New Futures will champion legislation to help child care centers better support children with developmental delays and challenging behaviors, ensuring that New Hampshire can work to address the real reasons behind expulsion — and keep more kids like Ziannah in the classrooms where they belong.

CHILD CARE EXPULSION STATISTICS

250

An estimated 250 preschool children are expelled from their classroom every day across the United States

24%

Preschoolers with disabilities make up just 24% of enrollment nationally, but account for 62% of expulsions

309

In a 2026 study of 309 early care and education providers, even modest levels of provider burnout were linked to higher expulsion risk, underscoring the need to invest in staffing, training, and support for early care providers



CHILDREN'S BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Supporting a comprehensive system of care for children and families.



Saving Lives by Funding 988

This year, drivers crossing the bridges connecting New Hampshire and Maine started seeing something new: simple signs reading “There is hope. YOU MATTER. Text. Call. Chat. 988.” The signage is a visible marker of how central the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline has become to the Granite State’s response to people in crisis — including its youngest residents.

The need is real and well documented. New Hampshire’s newly released 2025 Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that 15.9 percent of high schoolers had seriously considered suicide in the past year, and 5.8 percent had attempted it. More than a third reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness. These numbers have continued to improve since their pandemic-era peak, but they remain far too high — and behind every one is a young person who needs somewhere real to turn. The same survey found that four percent of NH students had already called, texted, or chatted 988 in the past year, and 1.4 percent had contacted the Rapid Response Access Point directly — proof that kids in this state already know this lifeline exists, and are using it.

That’s what the New Hampshire Rapid Response Access Point is built for. Any child, youth, or family in the state can reach it 24/7 by phone, text, or chat — calls to 988 from a 603 area code route automatically to a trained crisis clinician who can talk the caller through the moment, dispatch a mobile crisis team to meet them in person, or connect them to one of the state’s crisis stabilization centers in Derry or Laconia. In 2024 alone, New Hampshire’s call centers fielded more than 46,000 contacts.

YOUTH CRISIS STATISTICS

15.9%
of NH high schoolers seriously considered suicide in the past year

4%
of NH high schoolers have called, texted, or chatted with 988 in the past year

0
permanent, dedicated funding dollars to support the Rapid Response Access Point

The problem is that this system is running on borrowed time.
Unlike 911, which has been permanently funded for decades through a small surcharge on phone bills, the Rapid Response Access Point depends on year-to-year appropriations in the state budget, leaving it vulnerable to shifting state priorities and, as New Hampshire saw in 2025, to sudden federal funding cuts that can end contracts with little warning.

That’s why New Futures is returning to Concord in 2027 to again make the case that New Hampshire needs to fund 988 and the Rapid Response Access Point permanently, using the same proven surcharge model that has kept 911 reliable for over 30 years. Every time a New Hampshire teenager in crisis reaches a real person in seconds instead of a busy signal, it’s because this system exists. Permanent funding ensures it’s still there for the next kid who needs it.

HEALTH CARE ACCESS

Ensuring access to quality, affordable health care.

A Manchester resident shares concerns for their own and their neighbors' future during a Medicaid community conversation at the NH Food Bank.

Expanding our Reach to Protect Medicaid

At a community conversation earlier this year in Derry, a local mother described what it's like preparing for her Medicaid redetermination — the annual review the state conducts to confirm she still qualifies for health insurance coverage. Her renewal date falls at the start of the new year, right between the holidays and her child's birthday.

"I literally go into uber stress mode," she shared.

Her anxiety is about to become far more common. The new federal law known as the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA) set in motion nearly $1 billion in cuts to NH Medicaid over the next decade. It includes new eligibility rules, more frequent redeterminations, and work requirements for individuals enrolled in the Granite Advantage Health Care Program, New Hampshire's Medicaid expansion program.

Since then, New Futures and its partners in the NH Medicaid Matters coalition have worked hard to prepare the Granite State for the sweeping changes ahead. This includes hiring a dedicated communications staff to lead public education efforts, launching social media channels, and building a library of resources on the website, featuring FAQs and translated documents, designed for both the public and health care professionals.

To meet people where they are, the coalition launched a series of community conversations across the state detailing the Medicaid changes. Community members and stakeholders were invited to learn, share questions and concerns, and explore the impact these changes have on local patients, health care providers, and other stakeholders. The coalition also convened several hundred coalition members and health care leaders in New Hampshire for a series of webinars to break down the changes including the new federal guidance on work requirements.

The expanded reach into New Hampshire communities and health care networks is critical for future advocacy efforts. The stakes could not be higher: up to 29,000 Granite Staters are projected to lose their health insurance coverage, adding to the thousands who already are forgoing health insurance due to the expiration of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) premium tax credits.

As implementation moves forward, New Futures remains committed to ensuring policymakers hear directly from Granite Staters impacted most to minimize the worst-case scenarios and keep our state's health care system strong for everyone.

MEDICAID STATISTICS

- **187,000+**
  NH residents are covered by Medicaid
- **48%**
  of all NH Medicaid recipients are kids
- **64%**
  of nursing home residents are covered by Medicaid

SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

Addressing stigma and discrimination in care for those struggling with addiction.

Senior Vice President Jake Berry shares how Medicaid changes impact Granite Staters with substance use disorders at a community conversation in Derry.



> “This life-saving medication was in the right place when it mattered most.”
>
> – LAUREN MCGINLEY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF NEW HAMPSHIRE HARM REDUCTION COALITION

Photo Credit: New Hampshire Harm Reduction Coalition (nhhrc.org)

Prevention Belongs to Everyone

A small local coffee shop asked the New Hampshire Harm Reduction Coalition (NHHRC) for a training on how to use naloxone, the medication used to reverse opioid overdoses. Weeks later, staff called back: the medication had been needed, and it saved a life.

“There’s no reason it would have been there without their request,” said NHHRC Executive Director Lauren McGinley. “This life-saving medication was in the right place when it mattered most.”

As a critical part of New Hampshire’s continuum of care for substance use disorder, harm reduction works best when it’s already in place before a crisis hits. Syringe service programs are a key part of building that readiness. In 2024, New Hampshire’s 13 programs reversed 899 overdoses, conducted 62 overdose prevention trainings, and distributed more than 100,000 fentanyl test strips and thousands of doses of naloxone, making them the state’s largest direct distributor of life-saving medication to people who use substances.

In 2026, that infrastructure came under direct threat as several bills in the New Hampshire Legislature would have defunded and undermined syringe service programs statewide. New Futures worked closely with NHHRC to defeat this harmful legislation. Lauren shared what was at stake: “If we had to pass some of the more restrictive ordinances that came out this year, some programs would have closed. The vacuum that would have created — an entire population of people actively using substances with zero services — was scary.”

At the same time, New Futures helped to pass a bill strengthening safe disposal efforts within the syringe service programs. For Lauren, disposal was never a separate issue from the work itself. “Syringe service implies that anybody who needs access to syringes is who can be served there,” she said, “but we really can serve anybody. That means access to education, information, navigation to services, and supplies so people can remain safe.”

HARM REDUCTION STATISTICS

248
NH overdose deaths in 2024, down from 290 in 2023

13
syringe service programs (SSPs) across NH

899
overdoses reversed from SSPs in 2024

The breadth of these programs extends beyond people who use substances themselves. NHHRC hears from parents seeking guidance as their teenager heads off to college, family members concerned about a loved one showing signs of substance misuse, and local businesses and organizations asking how to keep life-saving medications on hand and use them safely. “I like to think some of our clients are actually people who want to assist in some way and make these environments safer for people, but just don’t know how,” Lauren said.

For the New Hampshire Harm Reduction Coalition, the guiding principle is simple: meet people and communities where they are. That’s why New Futures worked to make sure that’s still possible, for the people syringe service programs serve directly, and for the coffee shops, small businesses, and neighbors who are part of the same safety net. Public health and prevention belong to everyone.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Protecting New Hampshire's public health system.

New Futures hosts a roundtable discussion with Senator Maggie Hassan and local health care and advocacy leaders on the importance of immunization access for NH kids and families.



Most notably, 7-hydroxymitragynine (7-OH) has been engineered into a product with far more potency than anything found in nature.

Behind the Label

Walk into almost any gas station in New Hampshire, and you'll find kratom products marketed like herbal tea — bright labels, wellness branding, promises of energy and calm.

What that packaging doesn't say is that many of these products no longer resemble the plant they're named for. Manufacturers have learned to chemically alter kratom alkaloids into high-potency concentrated extracts. Most notably, 7-hydroxymitragynine (7-OH) has been engineered into a product with far more potency than anything found in nature — and it is being sold to Granite Staters with none of the guardrails that govern alcohol, tobacco, or cannabis.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), kratom-related poison control calls rose roughly 1,200 percent nationally from 2015 to 2025 and rose from 258 to 3,434 in a single year. The agency explicitly linked the sharpest recent surge to high-potency semisynthetic formulations like 7-OH. Over that decade, 233 kratom-related deaths were reported, while the kratom industry has grown into a billion-dollar market with every incentive to resist regulation.

Treatment and recovery providers across New Hampshire are seeing the impacts. A nurse at a treatment detox facility told lawmakers that they have at least two patients detoxing from kratom in their 24-bed facility at any given time, a significant increase in recent years.

At Navigating Recovery in Laconia, Ihab Riskalla, a recovery coach and the organization's development and outreach coordinator, has watched the same shift firsthand. His biggest concern is 7-OH specifically.

"The doses that are available at the smoke shops have doubled, if not tripled" in the past year, Ihab said. Providers who once discounted 7-OH now see clients whose only substance of use is 7-OH — including people who'd gotten sober from opioids, started using 7-OH, and found the withdrawal just as severe. Suboxone prescribers are now fielding more new requests tied to 7-OH than fentanyl, many from people under 24 years old — a reflection of how easy it is to find: near his office alone, four smoke shops sell it within less than a mile.

KRATOM STATISTICS

1,200%
increase in kratom-related poison control calls nationwide, 2015-2025

233
kratom-related deaths reported over the last decade

100K
children ages 12-17 have reported using kratom in their lifetime

That accessibility is about to collide with a shifting federal picture. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommended in 2025 that concentrated 7-OH be classified as a Schedule I controlled substance, and in July 2026 the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) formally moved to place 7-OH and three related synthetic derivatives in that category. If and when a federal ban on 7-OH lands, it could take effect with little advance warning.

New Futures is watching the federal process closely, and if 7-OH isn't banned nationally, will return to Concord in 2027 to pursue state legislation banning synthetic and semi-synthetic kratom alkaloids. Either way, New Hampshire's continued investment in treatment has to be part of the conversation: whatever the timeline, people already dependent on these products need somewhere to turn. The public health of Granite Staters is on the line.



REGULATION OF ADDICTIVE PRODUCTS

Preventing substance use through community education and regulatory strategies.



New Futures recognizes the NH Division of Enforcement & Licensing for their outstanding work on legislation in the 2026 legislative session.

Closing the Loopholes

Holley Hill remembers waking up in a psychiatric ward after four years of using a legal, highly addictive, brightly colored canister sold in gas stations and convenience stores. Her father had found her stranded in a Concord smoke shop parking lot, out of gas, but still able to buy 200 more nitrous oxide cartridges. Her twin sister later found her car littered with more than 7,000 used canisters.

"My rock bottom was lower than I ever imagined it could be," Holley told lawmakers earlier this year.

Before active substance use took hold, Holley was a mother and a librarian. During her testimony, she told lawmakers that she bought hundreds of canisters a day, without ever being asked her age or denied a purchase by store clerks. Over six months, she spent $26,000, first online and then across a circuit of stores between Laconia and Concord. She survived, but many people who reach her level of usage do not.

Holley's story, and others like it, moved lawmakers this session. New Futures championed a full slate of bills to close loopholes that let corporations market and sell addictive products in New Hampshire, and this year, two of the bills crossed the finish line.

House Bill 1630 bans the sale of nitrous oxide and other inhalants for recreational use at licensed retail stores statewide, closing a gap that lets smoke shops and gas stations sell canisters to anyone, regardless of age. Senate Bill 624 restricts hemp-derived THC products by closing the loophole that let synthetic and high-potency THC products skirt regulation under the state's hemp laws. Both bills take effect January 1, 2027.

The critical need for these bans is well-documented. Chronic nitrous oxide use disables the body's ability to use vitamin B12, which research links to nerve damage and psychiatric symptoms including psychosis. Hemp-derived THC carries its own risks: the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) notes cannabis use can have lasting effects on the developing brain in adolescence, and high-potency THC is linked to psychotic disorders. Both products reach young people through the same route — unregulated retail access.

These wins happened because advocates, law enforcement, and regulators from the New Hampshire Division of Enforcement and Licensing came together to educate lawmakers on the serious harms these products present.

ADDICTIVE PRODUCTS STATISTICS

156
annual nitrous oxide deaths in 2023, up from 23 in 2010

14-22
the age range most targeted by inhalant marketing

11%
of U.S. 12th graders reported using Delta-8 THC in the past year in 2023

New Futures staff catch up with advocates who shared their experiences aging in New Hampshire.

HEALTHY AGING

Supporting choices and access to care for older adults.

Holding Together NH's Care System

Anne Marie Sirrine has spent 21 years supporting family caregivers through the Referral Education Assistance & Prevention (REAP) program at Seacoast Mental Health Center.

While she's heard many stories, one stays with her: a husband caring for his wife through Alzheimer's disease, so determined to keep her at home that he sacrificed his own health. He was sleep-deprived, depressed, and beginning to experience cognitive decline himself.

"His experience is far from unique," Anne Marie shared with lawmakers at a public hearing.

Caregivers are a vital but often undervalued part of New Hampshire's long-term services and supports (LTSS) system. In New Hampshire, 281,000 adults provide unpaid family care valued at more than $4.4 billion annually, yet only 11 percent receive any formal training. Nearly one in four report feeling socially isolated, and 43 percent experience moderate to high emotional stress, according to AARP and the National Alliance for Caregiving.

To close gaps in support for New Hampshire caregivers, New Futures championed Senate Bill 608, which was signed into law in May of 2026. The law now requires caregiver support services such as counseling, education, peer support, and assessment for family caregivers who are supporting loved ones enrolled in the Acquired Brain Disorder (ABD) and Choices for Independence (CFI) Medicaid waiver programs.

This new law also improves access to child care assistance for grandparents and other relatives raising children, removing work requirements for caregivers of retirement age and eliminating the cost-share for kinship families.

CAREGIVER STATISTICS

- **281,000**
  family caregivers in NH
- **$4.4 billion**
  worth of care provided
- **1 in 4**
  caregivers report social isolation
- **43%**
  of caregivers experience moderate to high emotional stress

> "His frustration with his wife dropped significantly because he finally understood what she was experiencing and how to respond compassionately."
>
> – ANNE MARIE SIRRINE, STAFF THERAPIST AND DIRECTOR OF REAP AT SEACOAST MENTAL HEALTH CENTER

For the husband in Anne Marie's care, targeted education and support made a measurable difference. Within weeks, his depression eased, his sleep improved, and his stress decreased.

"His frustration with his wife dropped significantly because he finally understood what she was experiencing and how to respond compassionately," Anne Marie remembered.

As New Hampshire continues to age, legislative wins like this one carry even more weight. New Futures will keep working to make sure family caregivers like the husband in Anne Marie's care get the support they need so they can continue to provide essential services that keep loved ones at home and without reaching a breaking point.



Impact Report

OUR 2026 ADVOCATES:

1,400+
UNIQUE ADVOCATES

1,700+
ADVOCACY EMAILS SENT TO LAWMAKERS

63
STORIES COLLECTED

27
OP-EDS SUPPORTED

200+
PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

7,300+
TEXT MESSAGES SENT TO ADVOCATES & LAWMAKERS

Financial Summary

OUR IMPACT:

In a challenging budget year,

$2.8 Million
NEW FUTURES 2026 ANNUAL REVENUE

Was used to help secure:

$199 Million
IN STATE & FEDERAL DOLLARS IN THE FY 2026-27 NEW HAMPSHIRE STATE BUDGET FOR PROGRAMS SUPPORTING NEW HAMPSHIRE'S MOST VULNERABLE CHILDREN, FAMILIES, AND INDIVIDUALS

VALUE CREATED

Every ten dollars invested in New Futures returned $700 in funding for critical community programs.

Our Approach

Cultivating Civic Leadership

Providing individuals with the knowledge, skills, resources, and opportunities they need to take control of their story and create positive public policy change.

Educating Communities

Supplying communities with information and resources that help them understand complex issues, make informed decisions, and take action to improve the policies impacting their lives.

Building Partnerships

Bringing together individuals, organizations, and communities to work towards common goals through collaboration, resource sharing, and coordination.

Advancing Public Policy

Bringing the knowledge and expertise required to develop, implement, and evaluate public policy solutions to effectively address the needs and concerns of individuals and communities.



The Team at New Futures

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Improving the health and well-being of all New Hampshire residents.



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SOLVING PROBLEMS THROUGH POLICY CHANGE

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