



## MEDIA RELEASE

**For Immediate Release**  
**May 16, 2022**

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### **40 Black and Latinx Leaders Forge New Chapter in State Health Reform**

**The Dimock Center, Roxbury, Mass.** – Calling for breakthrough policy change at the highest levels of state government and across institutions, Black and Latinx leaders from throughout Massachusetts today announced the formation of a coalition to advocate for and advance health equity in the Commonwealth. The 40 founders of the *Health Equity Compact* represent a diverse set of healthcare, business, and non-profit organizations and aim to usher in a new era of state health reform.

“Massachusetts has continued to build on its health reform legacy by working to expand health coverage, redesign payment systems and control costs,” said Michael Curry, President and CEO of the Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers and a founding member of the Compact. “What we have failed to do is address the systemic and institutional inequities that prevent all of our residents from achieving full health and wellness. The Compact’s members believe that through collective action and shared responsibility we can change those institutions and systems to benefit all in Massachusetts.”

The Compact’s members came together after witnessing glaring disparities in COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths among people of color at the height of the pandemic. In the summer of 2020, Massachusetts Department of Public Health data revealed that:

- Although Latinx residents made up 12% of the state’s population, they comprised 29% of total COVID-19 cases. For Black residents those numbers were 7% and 14%, respectively.
- Black residents were 2.4 times more likely to be hospitalized and 2.1 times more likely to die from COVID-19 than were white residents.
- Latinx residents were 1.6 times more likely to be hospitalized and 1.6 times more likely to die from the virus than were white residents.

“Racial and ethnic disparities in healthcare have been well documented by academia, state government, and healthcare organizations across Massachusetts,” said Juan Lopera, Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer at Beth Israel Lahey Health and a Compact member. “While these disparities are not new, the disproportionate health and economic toll that COVID-19 continues to exact on communities of color demonstrate the extent to which inequities have been built into our institutions and systems.”

The unequal burden of the pandemic combined with growing awareness of pervasive racial injustice – brought into tragic focus by the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery – have created what Compact members believe to be an unprecedented sense of urgency and opportunity to bring together a broad range of stakeholders to transform the Massachusetts healthcare system.

“There are currently myriad efforts underway to tackle health disparities from many groups in this state – from hospital systems to public agencies to advocacy organizations,” said Jeffrey Sanchez, Principal, Sánchez Strategies, LLC and former Chair of the Massachusetts House Ways and Means Committee. “To create lasting, breakthrough change, we need to take this opportunity to align the work toward a common agenda. Our goal is to elevate the intentionality, connectivity, and shared responsibility to advance health equity together as the next chapter of Massachusetts health reform.”

Health Equity Compact members purport that until now, efforts to address health equity and racial justice both in Massachusetts and nationally have been fragmented. Instead, the Compact is advocating for a comprehensive approach intended to implement change at the deepest and broadest levels. To that end, the coalition has worked to develop a set of priority areas that call for an equity-in-all policies approach for centering equity in Massachusetts. That approach aims to build more effective programming, strengthen state government’s role, and create ways to measure statewide progress toward eliminating racial and ethnic health disparities.

The policy priorities will also encourage partnerships across the state’s healthcare, business, and nonprofit sectors to address social determinants of health — access to food, affordable housing, transportation, childcare, and more — that account for 80 percent of a person’s health status. The Health Equity Compact will offer a series of proposals as early as November 2022 that call for:

- A wide-ranging plan to address capacity and diversity in the healthcare workforce. Attracting and supporting the continuing training and education of Black and Brown employees will ensure that the healthcare system reflects – and by providing jobs – strengthens the communities it serves;
- Redesign of the healthcare payment system so that it rewards health equity and addresses gaps such as behavior health and health-related social needs like food access, affordable housing, transportation, and childcare;
- Advocate for policies that expand MassHealth coverage to more working families and vulnerable groups, as well as bridge the digital divide so that patients can take better advantage of new care modalities such as telehealth and digital monitoring of health conditions; and
- Systemically address the social determinants of health, including pushing for the creation Health Empowerment Zones across which local, state, federal, and nonprofit public health efforts can be coordinated in the Commonwealth’s most marginalized communities.

## Members of the Health Equity Compact

Allison Bryant, MD, MPH  
Associate Professor at Harvard Medical School and  
Senior Medical Director for Health Equity at MGB

Assaad Sayah, MD, FACEP  
President and CEO of Cambridge Health Alliance

Bisola Ojikutu, MD, MPH  
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Cain Hayes, MBA  
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Christopher Lathan, MD, MS, MPH  
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Charles Anderson, MD  
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Evelyn Barahona  
Director of the Latino Equity Fund

Frank Robinson, PhD  
Vice President of Public Health and Community Relations at Baystate Health

Frederica Williams, FCIS (UK), MBA  
President and CEO, Whittier Street Health Center

Greg Wilmot, MBA  
President and CEO of East Boston Neighborhood Health Center

Guy Fish, MD  
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Jeffrey Sanchez, MPA  
Principal, Sánchez Strategies, LLC and former Chair of the Massachusetts House Ways and Means Committee

Joan Y. Reede, MD, MPH, MS, MBA  
President at Biomedical Science Careers Program; Professor of Medicine, Dean of Diversity & Community Partnership, Director of Minority Faculty Development Program, and Director of Commonwealth Fund Mongan Fellowship in Minority Health Policy at Harvard Medical School

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Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer at Tufts Medicine

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