



Massachusetts
Taxpayers Foundation



Health Equity Highlights

June 2023 - June 2024

Since last year's Health Equity Trends Summit, there have been significant initiatives that demonstrate the momentum towards systemic change to advance health equity and racial justice across Massachusetts.



KEY THEMES OF PROGRAMS IN MASSACHUSETTS GOVERNMENT

- Improving State Agency Practices Surrounding Equity and Bias
- Integrating Demographic Data Collection into Health Research
- Strengthening Collaboration Between State Agencies to Advance Health Equity
- Increasing a Focus on Health-Related Social Needs Across Agency Priorities

SPOTLIGHT: ADVANCING HEALTH EQUITY IN MASSACHUSETTS FROM EOHHS

What's the goal? Advancing Health Equity in Massachusetts (AHEM) aims to reduce the number of preventable deaths by aligning and accelerating public and private efforts and by implementing and expanding effective pilots. Success will be measured by a reduction in premature mortality rates.

What has happened so far? The **Executive Office of Health and Human Services** (EOHHS) launched a new place-based initiative to reduce health inequities by assessing and expanding pilot programs in two key areas:

- Maternal health
- Social determinants of health related to cardiometabolic diseases

The maternal health team focuses on supporting mothers and infants while the social determinants team tackles living conditions and societal factors, like unequal access to healthcare, that increase vulnerability to cardiometabolic diseases. EOHHS will focus its efforts in 10 areas across the state identified as having the most extreme health disparities and will assess and expand effective programs in these areas.

What's next? The plan, based on recommendations from a 2023 Healey-Driscoll Administration report, is currently in its first year. In the coming months, AHEM will focus on community engagement, assessing ongoing initiatives, and targeting pilot strategies for implementation.

SPOTLIGHT: CHIA'S HEALTH EQUITY DATA COLLECTION & REPORTING

What's the goal? The Center for Health Information and Analysis (CHIA) aims to ensure that demographic information is consistently included in its data assets and to integrate an equity focus into existing and future reports. This research will inform policymakers and health systems on health equity topics.

What has happened so far? CHIA has focused on health equity in three key ways: integrating an equity lens into their existing research, expanding and enhancing demographic data collection, and supporting ongoing efforts at organizations like EOHHS and the Health Equity Compact. As part of this work, CHIA released several recent research projects with clear relevance to health equity, including:

- An [assessment](#) of acute hospital utilization by race/ethnicity,
- An [analysis](#) of disparities in continuity of health coverage specifically for foreign-born Massachusetts residents, and
- An [interactive dashboard](#) that disaggregates hospital average length of stay data by several demographic factors like sex, race, and ethnicity.

These publications demonstrate the persistence and degree of racial and ethnic health disparities.

What's next? CHIA will build upon their current advancements and continue to incorporate health equity and demographic data points into their reporting and research, in addition to publishing standalone health equity-focused reports. CHIA will also continue to assist in implementing the Hospital Quality and Equity Incentive program by collecting demographic data reported by hospitals and utilizing it in their research.

OTHER PROGRAMS IN MASSACHUSETTS GOVERNMENT INCLUDE:

- The **Health Policy Commission's** (HPC) recent work has emphasized that growing healthcare costs and affordability are equity issues. In its most recent [Healthcare Cost Trends Report](#), the HPC recommends modernizing the Commonwealth's benchmark framework to prioritize healthcare affordability and equity for all. The plan includes coordinating with sectors that impact health, such as social services, to identify areas of health inequities and set measurable goals for change.
- The **Health Connector** implemented several program design changes to adopt a more equity-centered approach to closing coverage gaps. This includes focusing public awareness and enrollment assistance efforts in historically underserved communities with low coverage rates and offering \$0 co-pays in the ConnectorCare program for chronic diseases like hypertension, which disproportionately impact communities of color. At the start of 2024, the Health Connector launched a [ConnectorCare expansion pilot](#), raising plan income limits from \$43,740 to \$72,900 for a single individual. These efforts support more equitable access to care.
- The **Department of Public Health** (DPH) released a [Strategic Plan to Advance Racial Equity](#) that specifies a racial equity-centered approach across all public health functions and services. Key aspects of the plan include engaging effectively with populations most impacted by racial inequities in health, increasing workforce capacity, implementing a data equity framework for future dashboards, and increasing DPH training on equity and bias.

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