

Health Equity Task Force

Established by Chapter 93 of the Acts of 2020

A Blueprint for Health Equity: Final Report Overview

July 1, 2021

“Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhumane.”

Martin Luther King, Convention of the Medical Committee for Human Rights, Chicago, March 1966



Health Equity Task Force Final Report: Overview of Slides

Legislative Charge to Health Equity Task Force	Slide 4
Health Equity Task Force: Approach and Interim Report	Slide 5
Key Messages	Slide 6
Key Actions to Advance Massachusetts as an Equity Leader	Slide 7
<u>Final Report Areas</u>	Slides 8 - 14
1. Executive Summary	
2. Ongoing Response to the COVID-19 Crisis	
3. Strengthen Access to Quality, Affordable Health Care and Other Services	
4. Address Social Factors in Health	
5. Strengthen the Local and State Public Health System	
6. Integrate Equity and Resilience into Emergency and Disaster Preparedness	
7. Prioritize Equity in State Government	
<u>Appendix</u>	Slides 15 - 19
A. Task Force Members	
B. Summary of Task Force Meetings, Hearing and Presentations	

Chapter 93 of the Acts of 2020 Charge to the Health Equity Task Force

“...study and make recommendations to the general court that address health disparities for underserved or underrepresented populations based on culture, race, ethnicity, language, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, geographic location, including, but not limited to, gateway cities with hospitals dedicated to caring for patients who test positive for COVID-19, and age in the Commonwealth during the COVID-19 pandemic.” (Section 2A of Chapter 93 of the Acts of 2020)

The Task Force was charged with developing recommendations including, but not limited to:

- **Improving safety for populations at increased risk for COVID-19** (essential workers, individuals in congregate settings, with underlying health conditions, and disproportionately impacted populations);
- **Removing barriers and increasing access to quality and equitable health care** services/treatment;
- **Increasing access to personal protective equipment, medical supplies, and COVID-19 testing**, including in diverse geographic locations;
- **Providing informational materials to underserved or underrepresented populations** in multiple languages on health care resources including, but not limited to prevention, testing, treatment/recovery;
- **Any other factors deemed relevant by the Task Force to address health disparities for underserved or underrepresented populations** based on culture, race, ethnicity, language, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, geographic location and age; and
- **further study of impacts of disparities** on populations not subject report.

Health Equity Task Force: Approach

16 Members with Health/Public Health and Legislative Backgrounds appointed by Legislative Leadership (see Appendix)
Co-Chairs Michael Curry and Assaad Sayah, MD

Met 17 times, all open to the public

Held 3 public hearings to obtain feedback from the general public

Several hundred individuals provided testimony or input

Conducted national scan for emerging best practices

Interim Report issued in October 2020

Final Report in July 2021 (reviewed/public comment in February – March 2021 with input to state policymakers on rolling basis)

Issued Interim Report in October 2020 to provide timely considerations for state policy makers about immediate COVID-19 response; time-sensitive priorities for the state budget and policy action - a number of which have been adopted.

Recommendations included:

- 1) **data and reporting for health equity-informed COVID-19 efforts;**
- 2) **equitable COVID-19 vaccination;**
- 3) **a funding reserve account to support COVID-19 and health equity initiatives; and**
- 4) **pivotal supports to address social factors in health, the safety of essential workers and in congregate settings, and health care access.**

Health Equity Final Report: Key Themes/Messages

- **Black, LatinX, other diverse people of color, and other socially vulnerable persons including older adults and people with disabilities and low-incomes, fared far worse in the COVID-19 pandemic** with significantly higher rates of infection, death, and the socio-economic aftermath. These disparities are longstanding.
- **The Task Force’s Blueprint for Health Equity should serve as a catalyst for the concerted and comprehensive strategy and policy efforts to meet the challenge of this moment to move health and racial equity forward in an historic manner** so that no resident of the Commonwealth lives a shorter life, or suffers because of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age or disability.
- **Building on its October 2020 Interim Report, this Blueprint responds to the immediate inequitable impacts of COVID-19 and addresses the underlying root causes to advance an equitable recovery and to prevent such inequities in the future in 6 major areas.** Root causes are the “social determinants” of health and account for 80% of health status, as well as racism.
- **The voices of those most affected by this pandemic, Black, LatinX, other diverse people and those with other social vulnerabilities, must guide and inform decision-making and be engaged in carrying out solutions.**
- Throughout every aspect of these proceedings, the public identified the **need for more complete, data on race, ethnicity, language and other socio-demographic factors throughout every part of state government.**
- **Equity must be “North Star”** re: pandemic response/recovery and **durable progress** must be made on underlying drivers of inequity.

Health Equity Final Report: Key Actions to Advance Massachusetts as an Equity Leader

- With the **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding** at hand, the Task Force report aims to inform promising investment opportunities to address structural inequities that led to disproportionate pandemic impacts.
- Among the Task Force's most important recommendations are to **use an equity lens in investing ARPA funds and to use this report as a blueprint to set in motion enduring structures within state government to make durable progress to advance health equity.**
- Conduct a **COVID-19 After-Action Review of emergency response with an equity lens** on a rolling basis, beginning with the vaccine plan, report findings to Legislature and public with recommended action steps from the Administration.
- Create **Cabinet-level Executive Office of Equity with a Secretary of Equity** charged with creating 3- to 5-year strategic plans and data dashboards in collaboration with stakeholders and the branches of government. Also create accountable Equity Offices within each Secretariat.
- Create an **Equity in All Policies** practice to evaluate the impact of state policies and programs, beginning with an immediate equity analysis plan for the expenditure of ARPA funds.
- **Equity Data and Dashboards** on multi-dimensional indicators to track measurable progress and build transparency and accountability.

Health Equity Task Force Final Report: 6 Major Areas of Recommendations

Ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic and Recovery Response	Strengthen Access to Quality, Affordable Health Care and Other Services	Address Social Factors in Health	Strengthen the Local and State Public Health System	Equity and Resilience into Emergency and Disaster Preparedness	Prioritize Equity in State Government
<p>Promote Vaccine Equity</p> <p>Continue and Enhance the Stop the Spread Campaign</p> <p>Address the Needs of Vulnerable Populations</p> <p>Fund Research on the Intermediate and Long-term Effects of COVID-19</p>	<p>Digital Equity/Inclusion</p> <p>Health Coverage for Immigrant Children</p> <p>Equitable Resources for Safety Net Hospitals</p> <p>Strengthen Community Health Centers</p> <p>Behavioral Health Equity</p> <p>Support and Diversify the Healthcare Workforce</p> <p>Medicaid Opportunities to Address Health Equity</p> <p>Affordable Medications/ Care re: Chronic Conditions</p> <p>Improve Oral Health</p>	<p>Increase Food Access and Security</p> <p>Provide and Increase Emergency and Basic Income</p> <p>Assist Landlords, Homeowners and Tenants to Prevent Evictions and Foreclosure; Support Emergency Shelter</p> <p>Create Access and Inclusion for Immigrants</p> <p>Build “Communities of Opportunity”</p>	<p>Strengthen and Fund the Local Public Health System</p> <p>Support and Elevate the Massachusetts Department of Public Health</p>	<p>Enact Legislation to Create a COVID-19 After Action Review with an Equity Lens</p> <p>Require the Appointment of a COVID-19 After Action Equity Commission</p> <p>Appoint A Diverse and Representative COVID-19 After Action Commission</p> <p>Retain Third-Party Experts to Facilitate and Produce COVID-19 After Action Review</p> <p>Initiate COVID-19 After Action Review Now to be Undertaken on a Rolling Basis</p>	<p>Enact Legislation to Create and Resource a Cabinet-Level Executive Office of Equity</p> <p>Enact Provisions to Create and Resource Offices of Equity Within Every Secretariat</p> <p>Create Publicly Available Data Dashboards to Track Equity Progress</p> <p>Adopt Standard Data Collection Practices Critical to Measuring Progress</p> <p>Require an Equity in All Policies/Equity Impact Analysis on New Policies and Programs</p>

Task Force recommendations to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 especially for diverse and vulnerable populations and to respond to disproportionate impacts were at the heart of the October 2020 Interim Report. The Task Force called for equitable vaccination plans, and data and reporting for guide equity-informed response, along with necessary investments.

- The COVID-19 pandemic response and recovery has entered a new phase requiring further tailoring of community and populations-specific interventions, especially in light of lower vaccination rates for communities of color and the needs of populations at heightened risk.
- While much progress has been made, the pandemic is not behind us. Ongoing focus is on vaccination efforts to reach the underserved and youth upon federal authorization, likely booster vaccinations, emerging COVID-19 variants, and longer-term health and socio-economic effects.
- Many elements of the response follow in dedicated sections on urgent needs and resources for health care/behavioral health, health-related social needs, public health, and more.



1. Promote Vaccine Equity
2. Continue and Enhance the Stop the Spread Campaign
3. Address the Needs of Vulnerable Populations
4. Fund Research on the Intermediate and Long-term Effects of COVID-19

Immediate and Intermediate Action

3. Strengthen Access to Quality, Affordable Health Care and Other Services

Underlying health and health system inequities and unmet health needs have contributed to challenges and disproportionate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the Task Force identified a range of pressing health care areas for intermediate and long-term action.

1. Promote Digital Equity and Inclusion
2. Expand Health Care Coverage for Immigrant Children
3. Advance Equitable Resources for Safety Net Hospitals and the Communities They Serve
4. Strengthen Community Health Centers
5. Advance Behavioral Health Equity
6. Support, Expand, and Diversify the Healthcare Workforce
7. Advance Massachusetts Medicaid Opportunities to Address Health Equity
8. Remove Copayment Barriers for Affordable Medications and Care to Address Health Disparities
9. Improve Oral Health



Immediate and Intermediate Action

4. Address Social Factors in Health

COVID-19 has exposed that social and economic inequities are and have always been the drivers of health inequities. For example, food insecurity in Massachusetts doubled from 8% to almost 17%, accompanied by a dramatic increase in housing insecurity.

- Therefore Important policy recommendations address the root causes of these social and economic factors including food security, housing, transportation, language access, community safety for immigrants, and environmental justice.

1. Increase Food Access and Security
2. Provide and Increase Emergency and Basic Income
3. Assist Landlords, Homeowners and Tenants to Prevent Evictions and Foreclosure; Support Emergency Shelter
4. Create Access and Inclusion for Immigrants
5. Build “Communities of Opportunity”



Acting Now to Prepare for the Future

5. Strengthen the Local and State Public Health System

Local public health has stepped up in the COVID-19 response amid significant challenges and constraints, particularly the fractured, inequitable and underfunded system, currently the responsibility of 351 cities and towns.

- Legislation and new, sufficient state funding are imperative to strengthen/transform local public health.
- Implement recommendations of the Special Commission on Local and Regional Public Health, including professional standards and incentives for cross-jurisdictional sharing of public health functions regionally.

Massachusetts Department of Public Health merits additional support and investments to play a more elevated role during pandemic response and in all public health initiatives.

- A stronger foundation and infrastructure to carry out ongoing prevention programs and health equity initiatives to build community assets, promote equitable public health outcomes, and strengthen data collection, analysis, reporting and surveillance for disaster and public health indicators.
- Braided resources across state agencies would enable more comprehensive public health community initiatives - linked to the social factors in health such as food, housing, the environment and more.

1. Strengthen and Fund Local Public Health
2. Support and Elevate the Massachusetts Department of Public Health

Massachusetts can lead the nation in conducting an “After-Action Review” (AAR) with an Equity Lens guided by an appointed Commission and a participatory process.

- Legislation is needed now to commence the AAR and complete it on a rolling basis within 12 months.
- AARs are standard emergency management practice to evaluate what worked well and what could be improved. MA has opportunity lead the nation by conducting an AAR with an equity lens.
- While disasters disproportionately affect low-income persons, people of color and other vulnerable populations, the field does not fully account for this.
- Findings to be filed with Legislative and Administration leadership and public, with Administration recommended action steps.

1. Enact Legislation to Create a COVID-19 AAR with an Equity Lens
2. Require Appointment of COVID-19 After-Action Equity Commission
3. Appoint Diverse, Representative After-Action Commission
4. Retain Third-Party Experts to Facilitate/Produce COVID-19 AAR
5. Initiate COVID-19 AAR Now for Completion on a Rolling Basis

Acting Now to Prepare for the Future

7. Prioritize Equity in State Government

Passage of legislation now to establish structures within state government will ensure that equity is always central to the business of Massachusetts government. Several states and the federal government are moving in this direction for an enduring equity focus beyond COVID-19.

1. Enact Legislation Now to Create and Resource a Cabinet-Level Executive Office of Equity. Led by a Secretary of Equity.
2. Enact Provisions to Create/ Resource Offices of Equity Within Every Secretariat
3. Create 3 to 5 year strategic equity plans
4. Create Publicly Available Data Dashboards to Track Progress Towards Equity
5. Adopt Standard Data Collection Practices Critical to Measuring Progress
6. Require an Equity in All Policies/Equity Impact Analysis on New Policies, including of federal American Rescue Plan funds
7. Equity Advisory Board to ensure stakeholder input

Appendix

Health Equity Task Force Members

Senate Appointees

Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz

Senator Julian Cyr

Task Force Co-Chair, Michael Curry, Esq., Deputy CEO and General Counsel at Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers

Dr. Milagros Abreu, Executive Director, President and Founder of The Latino Health Insurance Program

Dr. Cassandra Pierre, infectious diseases physician and Assistant Professor of Medicine at Boston University

Dr. Frank Robinson, Vice President, Public Health and Community Relations, Baystate Health

Hirak Shah, Legal Counsel for Senate Minority Leader Bruce Tarr

House Appointees

Representative Carlos González

Representative Liz Miranda (commenced term February 2021) **(and Rep. Jose Tosado** - term through January 2021)

Task Force Co-Chair, Dr. Assaad Sayah, CEO, Cambridge Health Alliance; Commissioner of Public Health, City of Cambridge; Assistant Professor, Harvard Medical School

Dr. Kiame Mahaniah, CEO, Lynn Community Health Center

Dr. Myechia Minter-Jordan, President & CEO, DentaQuest Partnership for Oral Health Advancement & Catalyst Institute

Jeffrey Sanchez, Lecturer, Center for Public Health Leadership, TH Chan School of Public Health; Senior Advisor, Risky Partners

Beverly Stables, Health Care Policy Analyst for House Minority Leader Bradley H. Jones, Jr.

Chair of the MA Black and Latino Legislative Caucus

Representative Chynah Tyler

Chair of the MA Asian-American Legislative Caucus

Representative Donald H. Wong

Summary of Task Force Meetings, Public Hearing and Presentations

Meeting/Hearing	Topics	Resources
August 24, 2020 Task Force Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductory Meeting • Selection of Co-Chairs • Presentation by Office of Health Equity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task Force Meeting Slides • MA Department of Public Health Office of Health Equity Presentation
September 3, 2020 Task Force Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of Task Force Mandate • COVID-19 Recommendations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task Force Meeting Slides • MA Public Health Association Presentation
September 16, 2020 Public Hearing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Hearing to Receive Stakeholder Input 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task Force Meeting Slides • Testimony by Diverse Stakeholders
September 18, 2020 Task Force Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insights from Public Hearing • Process for Interim Report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task Force Meeting Slides
September 29, 2020 Task Force Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perspectives from Hotspot Community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task Force Meeting Slides • Presentations by Chelsea Collaborative and Chelsea City Manager • Presentation by Boston Black COVID-19 Caucus
October 7, 2020 Task Force Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interim Summary Report Review • Perspectives from Black & Latino and Asian-American Legislative Caucuses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening Session with MA Black and Latino Legislative Caucus and MA Asian-American Legislative Caucus
October 14, 2020 Task Force Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion and Approval of Interim Report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Filed Interim Report • Task Force Meeting Slides

<https://malegislature.gov/Commissions/Detail/512/Documents>

Summary of Task Force Meetings, Public Hearing and Presentations (continued)

Meeting/Hearing	Topics	Resources
October 28, 2020 Task Force Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion on Updates relative to the Filed Interim Report & the State Budget/Policy Process • Task Force Open Discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task Force Meeting Slides
November 18, 2020 Task Force Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation and Dialogue with National Academy for State Health Policy • Announcement re: Attorney General Healey's "Building Toward Racial Justice and Equity in Health" Forum/Report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task Force Meeting Slides • Presentation by National Academy for State Health Policy: Snapshot of State Approaches to Address Health Equity
December 16, 2020 Task Force Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • COVID-19 Vaccine Presentation and Equity Considerations • Presentation and Dialogue with the Office of Attorney General: "Building Toward Racial Justice and Equity in Health: A Call to Action" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task Force Meeting Slides • Presentation by the Office of MA Attorney General Maura Healey: Building Toward Racial Justice and Equity in Health: A Call to Action
January 19, 2021 Task Force Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panel Presentations: Telehealth, Digital Equity, and Health Equity Zones • Panel Presentations: Cross-Sector Digital Equity and Inclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task Force Meeting Slides • Presentations by MA Health and Hospital Association and convener of tMed Coalition, Community Care Collaborative, MA Medical Society, and One Neighborhood Builders, Providence, Rhode Island • Presentations by Lynn Public Schools, Essex County Community Foundation, and Springfield Public Schools/Digital Equity Alliance
February 1, 2021 Public Hearing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Hearing to Receive Stakeholder Input 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task Force Meeting Slides • Testimony by Diverse Stakeholders

<https://malegislature.gov/Commissions/Detail/512/Documents>

Summary of Task Force Meetings, Public Hearing and Presentations (continued)

Meeting/Hearing	Topics	Resources
February 2, 2021 Task Force Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation and Dialogue on Connecticut's Health and Health Equity Dashboards • Presentation and Dialogue on the Health Opportunity and Equity (HOPE) Initiative: Measures to Advance Health and Opportunity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task Force Meeting Slides • Presentation on Connecticut's Health and Health Equity Dashboards • Presentation of Health Opportunity and Equity (HOPE) Initiative: Measures to Advance Health and Opportunity
February 8, 2021 Public Hearing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Hearing to Receive Stakeholder Input 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task Force Meeting Slides • Testimony by Diverse Stakeholders
February 16, 2021 Task Force Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task Force Discussion of Subset of Elements of Final Report • Overview and Framing of Final Report • Ongoing COVID-19 Response • Prioritizing Equity through Structures in State Government • Cabinet-level Multidisciplinary Office of Equity • Equity Data and Dashboards • Equity in All Policies/Equity Impact Analysis • Integrating Equity into Emergency and Disaster Preparedness: A Call for an After Action Review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task Force Meeting Slides
February 23, 2021 Task Force Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task Force Discussion of Subset of Elements of Final Report • Social Factors in Health - Addressing Root Causes of Inequity • Access to Quality, Equitable Health Care and Other Services • Strengthening the Public Health System/Other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task Force Meeting Slides
July 1, 2021 Task Force Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting to Consider and Approve the Task Force's Final Report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final Report and Slides

<https://malegislature.gov/Commissions/Detail/512/Documents>