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## **Study by BCBSMA Foundation Sees Need for Better Data and Collective Action, Accountability on Racial Disparities**

**BOSTON (Dec. 21, 2021)** – The [Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation](#) today released a new study confirming that people of color in Massachusetts face persistent and pervasive health inequities, and called on policymakers and stakeholders to act collectively to implement solutions in partnership with those affected by structural racism.

Developed in collaboration with Manatt Health and guided by an advisory group of health equity experts from across the state, the [research report](#) provides a comprehensive resource to broaden understanding of racial and ethnic health disparities in Massachusetts and identifies distinct data gaps that, if addressed, can support collective action and accountability.

The study paints a clear picture that Black and Hispanic people are much more likely to lack health insurance and face cost-related barriers to care, limiting their access to routine medical care and adversely affecting their health outcomes. These disparities are longstanding but were further exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, which disproportionately affected people of color.

“The data show widespread health disparities experienced by racial and ethnic groups in Massachusetts, enough information to take action. In addition, our research team identified limitations in state data that could hamper our efforts to collectively monitor the impact of efforts to address them,” said Audrey Shelto, President and CEO of the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation. “We stand ready and eager to participate in any coordinated approaches to improve race and ethnicity data and in collaborative efforts to fulfill our moral imperative to address the disparities and achieve health equity.”

The advisory group of health equity experts helped identify the need for a common set of data that would allow for better coordination and collective accountability. The research team found that a lack of standard categories, and the aggregation of too many populations into the categories that do exist, mask significant variation with the population categories.



The data show that Black and Hispanic people receive worse care across a broad range of quality measures and experience higher rates of many adverse health outcomes, including infant or neonatal mortality, diabetes, asthma, and HIV mortality. People of color are also significantly more likely to be hospitalized or die as a result of COVID-19.

The Foundation believes that organizations including the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, the Health Policy Commission and the Center for Health Information and Analysis are well-positioned to advance efforts to strengthen data availability for public analysis. The Commonwealth could consider facilitating public-private partnerships with providers, payers, community-based organizations and other stakeholders.

According to the report, the root causes of health disparities in Massachusetts are complex and due to many factors, driven by historical and pervasive structural racism. There are many financial factors that create barriers to gaining access to health care, as well as social conditions that affect health and well-being, among people of color.

“There are numerous organizations across the state doing work in our own communities to address these known health inequities and that work clearly needs to continue in light of these findings,” said Frank Robinson, Vice President of Baystate Health and a member of the advisory group. “But the report also underscores the need to collaborate to define our goals as a state so that we can mark our progress.”

*The full report, titled “Racism and Racial Inequities in Health in Massachusetts: A Data-Informed Primer on Health Disparities in Massachusetts,” is available online at: <https://www.bluecrossmafoundation.org/publication/racism-and-racial-inequities-health-data-informed-primer-health-disparities>*

### **About the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation**

The mission of the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation is to expand access to health care for low-income and vulnerable individuals and families in the Commonwealth. The Foundation was established in 2001 with an initial endowment from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts. It operates separately from the company and is governed by its own Board of Directors. For more information, visit [www.bluecrossmafoundation.org](http://www.bluecrossmafoundation.org).

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