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The Road Ahead: Five Key Health Care Priorities for the Next Administration

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In early 2022, anticipating the election of a new governor and slate of legislative leaders, the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation solicited broad and diverse stakeholder perspectives on the most pressing health care issues in the Commonwealth.

Nearly 30 interviews with key Massachusetts stakeholders



Consumer Advocates – representing diverse populations and geographies



Providers – hospitals, physicians, community health centers, SNFs and home health



Health Plans – medical and behavioral health plans



Business Community – industry leaders and coalitions



Government Officials – leaders from Health Connector, MassHealth, and Legislature



Policy Experts – academic experts, policy researchers

Stakeholders Identified Five Health Care Priorities for the Next Administration

Five priorities emerged in stakeholder interviews, requiring immediate and focused action by state leaders.





Racial and ethnic health inequities among Massachusetts residents are stark realities that require urgent attention.

- Health inequities are the result of structural racism in social and economic systems, and structural racism in the health care system itself makes these inequities worse.
- The COVID-19 pandemic made it impossible to ignore that not all Massachusetts residents are able to access, afford, or experience health care equally.
- Current efforts to understand and address racial and ethnic inequities in the health care system largely lack input from people with lived experience, are uncoordinated and have no specific, measurable goals or accountability for achieving them.

Source: Source: Anthony, S., Boozang, P., Elam, L., et al. "Racism and Racial Inequities in Health: A Data-Informed Primer on Health Disparities in Massachusetts," Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation, Manatt Health. Dec. 21, 2021. Available at: <https://www.bluecrossmafoundation.org/publication/racism-and-racial-inequities-health-data-informed-primer-health-disparities>.



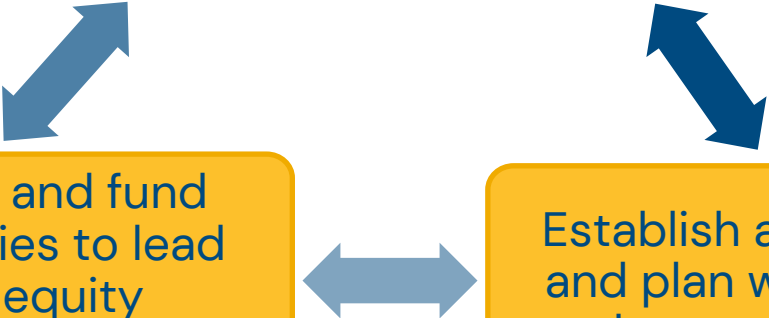
Addressing systemic racism in Massachusetts' social and economic systems requires a "long-term view" as well as a sense of urgency, leadership and action from the next administration and legislature.

Stakeholders urge the next administration to:

Establish and codify a leadership structure that is accountable for a "whole of government" and community-informed approach to equity.

Empower and fund communities to lead health equity advancement.

Establish a bold vision and plan with specific and measurable goals.

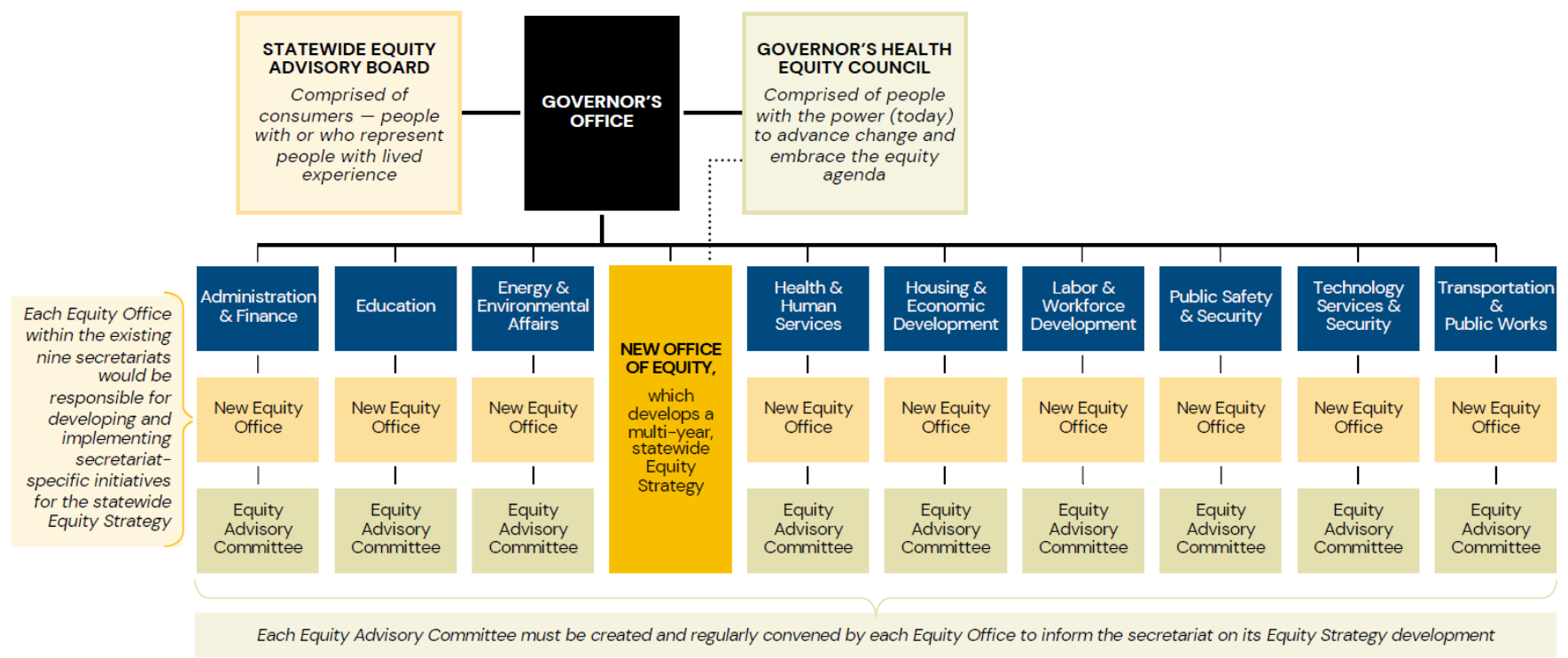




Creating a “Whole of Government” Structure to Advance Health Equity

The urgent charge of advancing health equity will require a “whole of government” structure and leadership across government agencies and departments with influence over health, education, transportation among other areas.

Proposed Leadership Structure To Advance Administration’s Health Equity Vision And Goals





Priority 2: Ensure Consumer Health Care Affordability

Health care is becoming increasingly unaffordable for residents of the Commonwealth both in terms of the cost to obtain insurance and the costs to use health care services, even with insurance.

- Despite high rates of insurance coverage in Massachusetts in 2021, 41% of residents reported that they or their families had health care affordability issues in the past 12 months.
- One-third of middle-class families in Massachusetts with employer-sponsored insurance devote more than a quarter of their income to health care.
- From 2017 to 2019, private insurance premiums grew 8%, compared to 6% average wage growth.

Source: Performance of the Massachusetts Health Care System, Annual Report, March 2021. Massachusetts Center for Health Information Analysis (CHIA).




Priority Action: Direct and Empower the Health Connector and Health Policy Commission

Massachusetts leaders must do more to ensure that Commonwealth residents have access to affordable health insurance coverage and health care services, such as:



Expand Health Connector offerings and strengthen the Health Connector's role

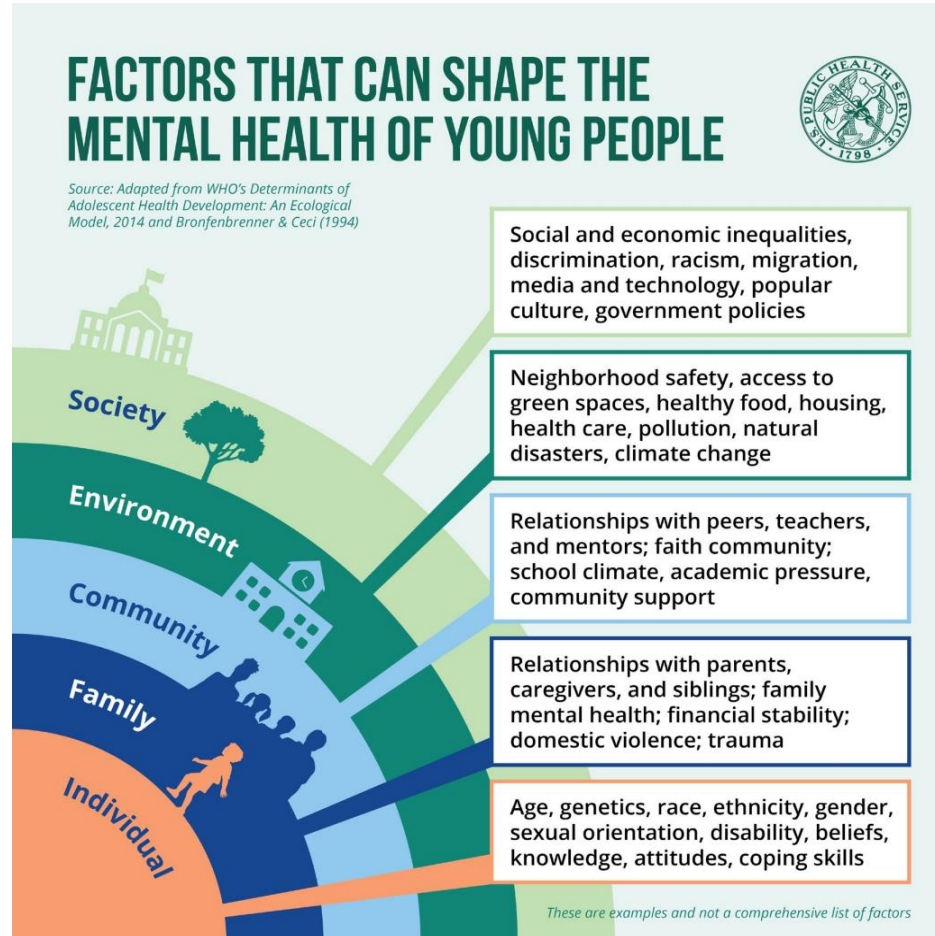


Expand the authority and charge of the HPC to more directly address consumer affordability



Priority 3: Confront the Mental Health Crisis for Children and Youth

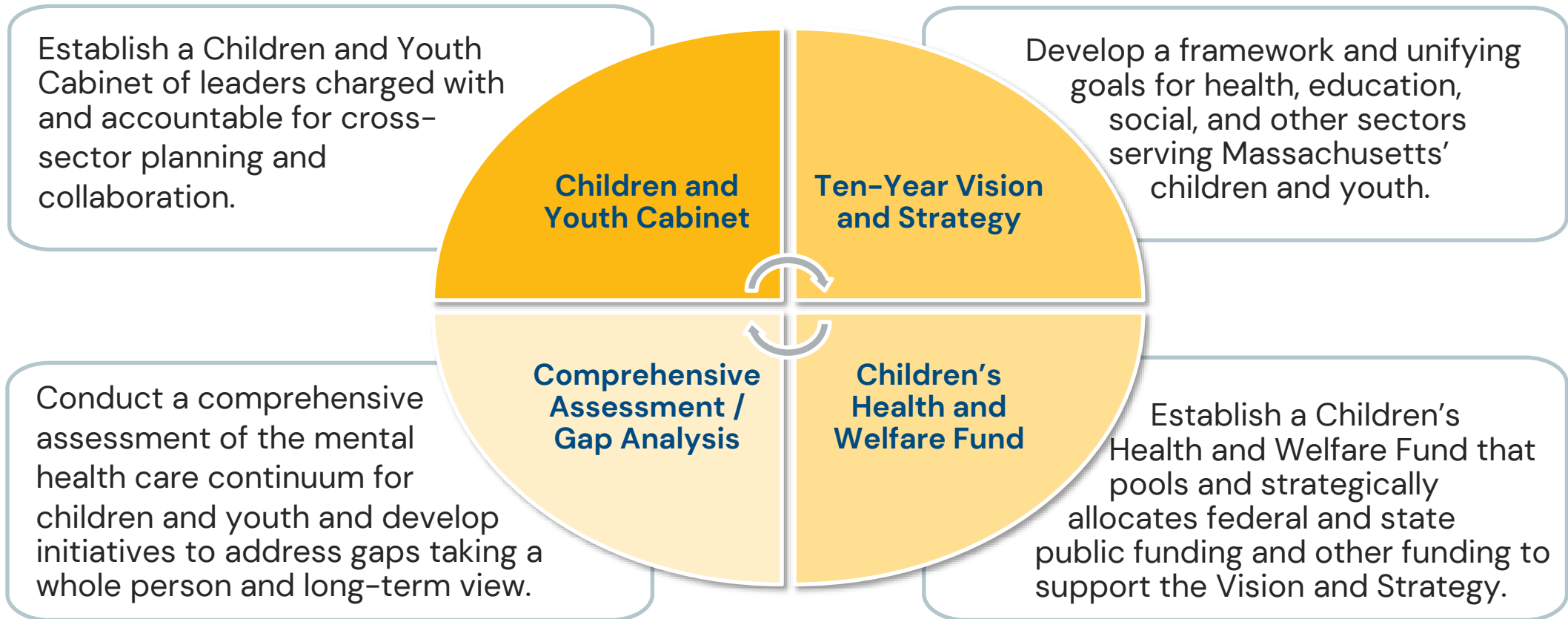
New state leaders will inherit a burgeoning mental health crisis for children and youth when they come into office.



Sources: Ursprung, W. W. S., Cardoso, L., Beatriz, B., et al. "COVID-19 Community Impact Survey (CCIS), Preliminary Analysis of Results as of April 6, 2022," Massachusetts Department of Public Health. Apr. 6, 2022. Available at: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/covid-19-community-impact-survey-ccis-preliminary-analysis-results-full-report/download>. Graphic: Surgeon General of the United States. "Protecting Youth Mental Health: The US Surgeon General's Advisory," U.S. Public Health Service. December 7, 2021. Available at <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-youth-mental-health-advisory.pdf>.



Addressing the mental health crisis for children and youth will require a coordinated approach “on all fronts.”





Priority 4: Improve Access to Long-Term Services and Supports, Including Long-Term Care

Long-term services and supports (LTSS), including long-term care (LTC), are unaffordable for many Massachusetts residents, and LTSS often are uncoordinated with other health and social support needs.

Lack of affordable payment options for LTSS

Particularly for people with moderate incomes who do not qualify for MassHealth (the primary payer of LTSS in the state).

Fragmentation of LTSS coverage and care delivery

From other parts of the health care system for all residents, but particularly for people who qualify for MassHealth.



Priority Action: Ensure All Massachusetts Residents Can Afford and Access LTSS as Part of an Integrated Health Care System

It is time to muster the political will, resources, and leadership to make LTSS more affordable for more people, and ensure that people who need LTSS receive person-centered, coordinated, and integrated care.

LTSS Affordability

Task a senior executive branch leader to solve long-standing challenges around LTSS planning, affordability, and financing

LTSS Fragmentation

Task executive leadership with advancing a state discussion on and pursuing MassHealth LTSS purchasing and care delivery strategies



Priority 5: Mitigate Critical Health Care Workforce Shortages

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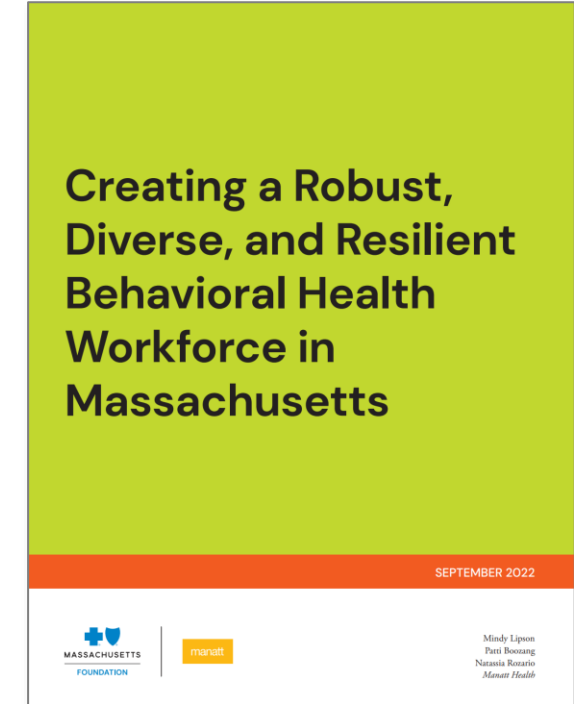
While the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the Commonwealth's entire labor market, the health care system—which employs roughly 18% of workers in the state—was uniquely impacted.

- Front-line workers in hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, and people's homes and communities faced high rates of burnout and disproportionately experienced COVID-19 exposures, cases and deaths.
- Not all health care sectors are rebounding from the pandemic or able to compete for new workers equally.
- Underinvestment in LTSS and behavioral health workers has suppressed wages/salaries, benefits, and other supports and created challenges with recruitment and retention.
- The shortage of behavioral health staff at all levels and across the care continuum (e.g., inpatient and community-based settings) is resulting in the closure of beds in both inpatient and outpatient settings.



New state leaders must develop a cohesive vision and 10-year action plan for strengthening the state's health care workforce, and immediately prioritize efforts to increase LTSS and behavioral health workers' wages to a living wage in Massachusetts.

- **Priority Action:** Develop and implement a 10-year health care workforce plan within the first six to nine months of 2023, prioritizing the LTSS and behavioral health workforce where demand for services is significantly outpacing supply.
- **Priority Action:** Immediately implement existing or newly proposed initiatives to support LTSS and behavioral health workers, with an explicit goal of incrementally increasing wages to a living wage in Massachusetts.



State leaders in Massachusetts have demonstrated that they can tackle complex, seemingly intractable health care issues.

- Key leaders across Massachusetts' government and health care sector identified these five priorities as the most pressing issues facing the state's health care system.
- These stakeholders also identified potential, impactful actions for addressing each of these issues, prioritizing those for immediate attention.
- Massachusetts' new generation of health care leaders must pick up the mantle of bold leadership and ingenuity to solve what many stakeholders have called "last mile" issues plaguing Massachusetts health coverage and care delivery systems, and carry on Massachusetts' legacy of health care leadership.

Q & A