

Strategies for Meaningfully Engaging MassHealth Members to Inform Program and Policy Decisions

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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ABOUT THE MASSACHUSETTS MEDICAID POLICY INSTITUTE

The Massachusetts Medicaid Policy Institute (MMPI)—a program of the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation—is an independent and nonpartisan source of information and analysis about the Massachusetts Medicaid program, MassHealth. MMPI’s mission is to promote the development of effective Medicaid policy solutions through research and policy analysis.

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR HEALTH CARE STRATEGIES

The Center for Health Care Strategies (CHCS) is a policy design and implementation partner devoted to improving outcomes for people enrolled in Medicaid. CHCS supports its partners across sectors and disciplines to make more effective, efficient, and equitable care possible for millions of people across the nation. For more information, visit www.chcs.org.

ABOUT EQUITABLE SPACES

Equitable Spaces’ mission is to create opportunities for community members with lived and living experiences of poverty and related issues, those who have been historically excluded from policy decision-making processes, to incorporate their knowledge, perspectives, and expertise into the design of the policies and programs that directly impact their lives. Equitable Spaces provides customized training, technical assistance, and additional supports to local, state, and national groups that seek to include this expertise in research, program, and policy design, implementation, and evaluation.

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INTRODUCTION

Increasingly, Medicaid programs are engaging with individuals who have lived experience with Medicaid, recognizing that member input is essential for effectively improving health outcomes and advancing equity. Massachusetts' Medicaid program and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), known as MassHealth, regularly engages with members to seek their input on program design and policy changes. These engagement approaches include recurring advisory councils, listening sessions, survey tools, and the recently announced MassHealth member advisory committee (MAC) set to formally launch sometime this year. MassHealth is committed to strengthening its current approach to member engagement to fully understand members' experiences with the MassHealth program, and to reach its goals of addressing inequities in health and health care.

To help inform MassHealth's efforts to strengthen its member engagement approaches, the Massachusetts Medicaid Policy Institute (MMPI), a program of the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation, enlisted the Center for Health Care Strategies (CHCS) and Equitable Spaces (ES) to conduct a landscape assessment of Medicaid member engagement promising practices across the country. In addition to a literature review and environmental scan, CHCS and ES conducted a series of stakeholder interviews with MassHealth and MassHealth entities, Medicaid representatives from six states, and 11 MassHealth members.

DEFINING "MEANINGFUL MEMBER ENGAGEMENT"

In this report, we define "meaningful member engagement" based on two key characteristics that surfaced from the research:

1. The members being engaged have **power or influence over the engagement process itself**, and
2. The engagement **leads to real changes in policies, programs, and procedures**.

Engagement where community members do not have any influence over the process and that results in no, or merely superficial, changes to a policy or program, risks reinforcing historic power imbalances between the people being served by Medicaid and the people in charge of administering the program. These interactions can lead to community mistrust, or a sense that members are being involved in a purely perfunctory and unfair manner, which can undermine the success of the engagement activity.

Source: State Health Value Strategies. "Transformational Community Engagement to Advance Health Equity." Available at: https://www.shvs.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/SHVS_Transformational-Community-Engagement-to-Advance-Health-Equity.pdf.

MASSHEALTH MEMBER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

MassHealth solicits member input through a variety of methods along a continuum of community involvement (see callout box on page 2 for more information on the community engagement continuum) and has recently signaled its commitment to strengthening its overall approach to engaging with MassHealth members. The following are some examples of MassHealth's current engagement strategies:

- **Member Experience Surveys:** Through subcontractors and entities familiar with consumer experience work, MassHealth regularly administers member satisfaction and experience surveys to better understand member experience with the delivery of primary care, behavioral health, and long-term services and supports.¹
- **Focus Groups/Listening Sessions:** MassHealth occasionally hosts listening sessions for stakeholders—including members—to share information about upcoming policy or programmatic changes and to gather stakeholder and member feedback. These listening sessions typically involve a mix of organizational stakeholders (e.g., providers, advocates, and community-based organizations) and members. MassHealth recently supported a focus group specifically for members to help with the planning for the end of the Medicaid continuous coverage requirements related to the end of the COVID-19 public health emergency.
- **Consumer Readers:** MassHealth periodically seeks member participation on contract review processes. In 2023, MassHealth procured consumer readers to review and submit feedback on applications submitted by potential health plans to serve as health plans for One Care and Senior Care Options (two managed care programs within MassHealth).
- **Member Advisory Bodies to Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs) and Other Managed Care Organizations (MCOs):** MassHealth ACOs and MCOs are contractually required to convene Patient and Family Advisory Councils (PFACs) to get feedback from their members. PFACs are newly required to be made up exclusively of health plan

members and/or their family members. Contract requirements direct ACOs and MCOs to work with PFACs for the purposes of, among other things, advising on the cultural appropriateness and member-centeredness of member or provider targeted services, programs, and trainings, and providing input on member experience survey data and assessments.²

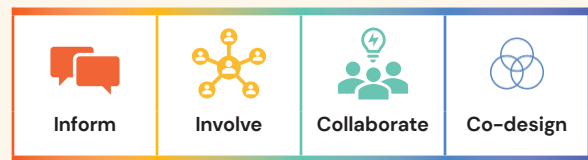
- One Care Implementation Council:** Established in 2013, the One Care Implementation Council ensures community stakeholders played an active role in the implementation and ongoing operations of the One Care program (a managed care option for MassHealth members with disabilities who are also enrolled in Medicare). The council has up to 21 members, with at least 51 percent being MassHealth members with disabilities, their family members, or caregivers. Other council members include representatives from community-based organizations (CBOs), advocacy organizations, labor unions, and providers.³

- MassHealth Member Advisory Committee:** In June 2023, MassHealth announced its plan to establish an agency-wide Member Advisory Committee (MAC), to be made up exclusively of current and/or previous MassHealth members, as well as guardians, family members, and caregivers of current or past members.⁴ The goals of the MassHealth MAC include providing a member-centric forum where members can share their ideas, perspectives, and recommendations on program and policy decisions. In early 2024, MassHealth announced the selection of [Collective Insight](#), a Massachusetts-based organization to support the creation of the MAC.

- Community Feedback Forum for Health and Justice:** Lastly, in January 2024, MassHealth announced its plans to create a stakeholder advisory committee to advise the state on its initiative to cover certain MassHealth services in the 90-day period before individuals are released from incarceration.⁵ The Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) seeks approximately 13 individuals to serve on the Community Feedback Forum for Health and Justice. Of those individuals, approximately eight will have lived experience with incarcerations in Massachusetts or will be a family member or guardian of an individual with such lived experience.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CONTINUUM

Every community engagement strategy can be placed on a continuum of community involvement. On one end of the continuum, the engagement activities are often more transactional in nature (e.g., “Inform”, which includes activities that provide Medicaid members with information to support their understanding of the program). As you move across the continuum, the activities shift the balance of decision-making power to members so that they have a stronger role in identifying concerns and preferred solutions (e.g., “Co-design”, which includes activities that place decision-making power in the hands of community members to co-create, implement, and evaluate community-defined processes and priorities).



See the [full report](#) for more detail on each level of the community engagement continuum.

MEMBER ENGAGEMENT GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following member engagement guiding principles are intended to help Medicaid state agencies or other entities (i.e., ACOs/MCOs, health care organizations, and large provider groups serving Medicaid members) as they work to develop their member engagement strategies. These principles were gleaned through the literature review, state interviews, and member listening sessions.

1. Prioritize Trust

Medicaid members have historically not been included in the decision-making processes around the programs intended to serve them. Further, many Medicaid members come from communities that have been racially, culturally, socially, or economically marginalized, and oftentimes mistreated by the medical system. Building trust with Medicaid members is an essential first step to gaining meaningful input and feedback from them.

2. Be Transparent

Transparency is the cornerstone of trust building. Transparency involves stating goals and objectives upfront, and providing regular updates on how member feedback has been applied—or not.

3. Provide Equitable Compensation

Compensating community members for their time ensures that those most impacted by Medicaid programs and policy can participate in critical conversations.

4. Promote Diversity and Inclusion

If the goal of member engagement is to design interventions that address health inequities, it is crucial to actively solicit the participation of members who reflect the full diversity of Medicaid programs. Further, understanding and addressing any barriers to participation (i.e., language, accessibility, information technology) ensures that everyone who wishes to engage is able to do so.

5. Use a Trauma-Informed Approach

When partnering with those most impacted by health inequities, the information policymakers seek is often closely connected to experiences of personal trauma. A trauma-informed approach (including, for example, providing empowerment and choice to members, and recognizing and addressing biases and historical trauma) can mitigate feelings of powerlessness and exploitation.

6. Devote Sufficient Resources to Member Engagement

Allocating sufficient resources to member engagement to support staff and member capacity building, compensation, and addressing participation barriers supports effective engagement interactions and ensures the sustainability of meaningful relationships between community and Medicaid programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUILDING ON MASSHEALTH'S MEMBER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

MassHealth is in a strong position to build on their current approach to member engagement. The following recommendations identify opportunities for MassHealth to continue strengthening its overall approach to engaging with MassHealth members, with the above guiding principles in mind.

1. Develop and Publish a Statewide Member Engagement Strategy

While MassHealth currently engages with members through a variety of channels, MassHealth's current member engagement approach could be strengthened by developing an overarching strategy. This overarching strategy would both leverage existing efforts and create a more systematic and sustained approach to integrating the lived experience of MassHealth members into program and policy design, implementation, and evaluation.

2. Strengthen Accountable Care and Managed Care Organization Member Engagement Requirements

In 2023, MassHealth strengthened its member engagement requirements for ACOs and MCOs, including stricter requirements on PFAC composition. There are additional opportunities for MassHealth to strengthen these requirements, for example by requiring contracted MassHealth entities to compensate members for participating in PFACs, and by supporting greater consistency and transparency of PFAC activities.

3. Support Staff and Member Participation

MassHealth should support both staff and members alike in building the skills necessary to partner effectively with one another. In acknowledgement of this, MassHealth has contracted with Collective Insight to provide technical assistance and skills-building related to member engagement to internal MassHealth program teams. MassHealth could also consider providing professional and capacity building support to members, particularly for those participating on advisory bodies, to ensure members feel prepared to be active participants. A curriculum might include training on meeting facilitation, agenda setting, conflict resolution, state budgeting processes, policy development, and public speaking.

4. Develop and Implement an Impact Measurement and Reporting Plan

Measuring the impact of member engagement efforts helps bring transparency and accountability to agency activities,

builds and maintains trust with members, and showcases their contributions and accomplishments. MassHealth should formally document what feedback they receive and what actions they take in response to each member engagement activity. MassHealth can also consider publishing an annual report that details its member engagement activities over the past year, ongoing engagement opportunities, and measured impact. MassHealth should also consider developing mechanisms to assess member awareness and experiences with engagement opportunities.

5. Stand Up MassHealth’s Member Advisory Committee

As mentioned above, MassHealth is currently developing its MAC, which will be comprised solely of current and former members, as well as family members and caretakers of MassHealth members. To build and maintain trust with members, and ensure the sustainability of the MAC, MassHealth will need to develop formal mechanisms to ensure that the feedback from the MassHealth MAC is conveyed to other stakeholders and to MassHealth leadership, and ensure that processes are in place so that member input can be meaningfully integrated into program and policy decision-making.

CONCLUSION

No one state has perfected a Medicaid member engagement strategy, and meaningfully engaging Medicaid members takes resources and time to get right. However, the potential payoff for Medicaid programs—and most importantly Medicaid members—is tremendous. As MassHealth and Medicaid agencies across the country renew their commitment to health equity, meaningful and robust member engagement efforts are central to ensuring they meet these commitments.

ENDNOTES

- 1 EOHHS. Bid Solicitation: BD-22-1039-EHS01-ASHWA-75350, RFR for MassHealth Member Experience Survey. May 16, 2022. Available at: <https://www.commbuys.com/bsa/external/bidDetail.sdo?docId=BD-22-1039-EHS01-ASHWA-75350&external=true&parentUrl=bid>.
- 2 EOHHS. Bid Solicitation BD-22-1039-EHS01-ASHWA-71410, Accountable Care Organizations Request for Responses. February 16, 2022. Available at: <https://www.commbuys.com/bsa/external/bidDetail.sdo?docId=BD-22-1039-EHS01-ASHWA-71410&external=true&parentUrl=close>.
- 3 Community Catalyst. “Case Study of the One Care Implementation Council.” Available at: <https://communitycatalyst.org/resource/case-study-of-the-one-care-implementation-council/>.
- 4 Shortly after MassHealth announced its intention to establish the Member Advisory Committee (MAC), the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) proposed new rules (which were subsequently finalized in April 2024) that require Medicaid agencies to bolster existing and develop new member advisory bodies. For example, these rules require Medicaid agencies to establish a Beneficiary Advisory Council (BAC), a standalone group comprised solely of Medicaid members, their families and/or caregivers. MassHealth’s proposed MAC would be designed to meet CMS’ requirements for a BAC: it will be made up exclusively of current and/or previous MassHealth members, as well as guardians, family members, and caregivers of current or past members.
- 5 EOHHS. Bid Solicitation: BD-24-1039-EHS01-ASHWA-97691, Notice of Opportunity to Participate in MassHealth’s Community Feedback Forum for Health & Justice. January 29, 2024. Available at: <https://www.commbuys.com/bsa/external/bidDetail.sdo?docId=BD-24-1039-EHS01-ASHWA-97691&external=true&parentUrl=close>.



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