

Open Letter to Massachusetts Legislative Leaders
Community-Based Prevention is Essential to the Success of Payment Reform

Originally delivered: September 12, 2011; List of signers updated: December 2, 2011

Senate President Therese Murray
Speaker of the House Robert A. DeLeo
State House
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Senate President Murray and Speaker DeLeo:

In the past several months, we have heard a growing chorus of leaders calling for the Commonwealth to move forward with legislation to reform our system of health care payment. **As you determine the next steps the Massachusetts legislature will take to advance the health of our residents, the undersigned organizations and individuals urge that as you move forward, you will enact legislation that ultimately promotes prevention and wellness by integrating health promotion and the prevention of disease into the fundamental mechanisms of our health care payment system.** We urge you to seize this opportunity to make community-based prevention a priority in the way that the Commonwealth pays for the health of our residents.

While the bulk of our health care system is dedicated to treating disease once residents seek out medical care, primary prevention, especially community-based prevention, has the potential to provide the greatest cost savings as well as the most equitable and robust health outcomes. For example, **prevention focused on reducing the rates of hypertension, diabetes, and associated complications could save Massachusetts \$450.4 million per year within 5 years.** (Ormond et al. Potential national and state medical care savings from primary disease prevention. *American Journal of Public Health*. 2011;101(1):157.)

While there is increased emphasis on payment for clinically-based prevention, our current health care system does not prioritize funding for community-based prevention; these programs have relied on outside public and private sources of funding, which cannot sustain the growing needs for preventative care in our communities. We strongly urge you to include specific funding for community-based prevention and public health in any payment reform measure passed by the legislature this year. We commend Representative Lewis and Senator Chandler for sponsoring H1498, *An Act to Promote Prevention and Wellness Through a Public Health Trust*, which provides a direct stream of funding for community-based public health efforts through the health care payment system.

We request that you include a mechanism such as the one proposed in this legislation in any payment reform measure that is passed in the House and Senate.

Such a focus on keeping residents of the Commonwealth healthy must be a cornerstone of meaningful health system payment reform. It is imperative that we ensure that new funding will supplement, not supplant, our current state investments in prevention and public health.

The opportunity that we have before us today – to enact comprehensive payment reform that emphasizes prevention and wellness, instead of just disease treatment – may not come again for decades. Without adequate funding for prevention, restructuring health care costs alone will not prevent these costs from continuing to rise as we treat the growing burden of preventable disease.

Cc: Representative Brian Dempsey, House Committee on Ways and Means
Senator Stephen Brewer, Chair, Senate Committee on Ways and Means
Representative Steven Walsh, House Chair, Joint Committee on Healthcare Financing
Senator Richard Moore, Senate Chair, Joint Committee on Healthcare Financing
Representative Jeffrey Sánchez, House Chair, Joint Committee on Public Health
Senator Susan Fargo, Senate Chair, Joint Committee on Public Health

Signed,

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