



Healthy People in a Healthy Economy

A Blueprint for Action in Massachusetts

PROBLEM: RISING HEALTH CARE COSTS AND CHRONIC DISEASE

The current recession is not just an economic crisis, it is also a health crisis.

The Boston Paradox: Lots of Health Care, Not Enough Health, a report published in 2007 by the New England Healthcare Institute (NEHI) and the Boston Foundation, juxtaposed the state of the Massachusetts economy with the state of residents' physical well-being. It described a double threat: rising health care costs combined with a rising tide of preventable chronic illness. It also found that high health care costs are crowding out investment in the fundamental determinants of health—from education and community safety to access to a healthy diet, exercise and health promotion initiatives.

The economic downturn is only making things worse. As people lose their jobs or see their incomes decline, they find it more difficult to afford out-of-pocket medical costs and health insurance premiums. And when times get tight, people also lose the means to eat healthfully and exercise regularly — while health care costs continue to climb.

Today, *more than half of all Massachusetts residents* are either overweight or obese. Diabetes has jumped *nearly 40 percent in a decade*, and *three out of every five people* with Type 2 diabetes will develop complications such as heart disease, stroke or eyesight problems.

At a time when we can least afford it, this rising tide of chronic disease is hurting not just our health, but the Massachusetts economy as well. A recent study by the Milken Institute estimated that chronic disease takes a \$34 billion toll on Massachusetts every year. And many experts feel that this economic impact will continue, exacerbated by Massachusetts' high health care costs and aging population.

NEEDED: A COMMONWEALTH CULTURE SHIFT

There is good news. Research indicates that personal behaviors and environmental factors have a much greater impact on health status than access to health care. Indeed, health care alone, while critical at key points of illness or injury, accounts for only about 10% of overall health status, while lifestyle and environmental factors together account for *about 70%*.

Moreover, research on the success factors of behavioral interventions suggest that wide-scale, population-wide improvements can be achieved through comprehensive, sustained efforts across many domains—from schools to workplaces to physicians' offices. **That means that much of the chronic disease burden in Massachusetts could be prevented or reduced through a culture shift that encourages and makes possible wellness and fitness across the population.**

Study in Brief:

In 2007, NEHI and the Boston Foundation (TBF) published *The Boston Paradox: Lots of Health Care, Not Enough Health*, which juxtaposed the state of the Massachusetts economy with the state of residents' physical well-being. As the economic downturn exacerbates this toll of unhealthy behaviors on our health and our economic prosperity, NEHI and TBF have once again joined forces to produce *Healthy People in a Healthy Economy: A Blueprint for Action in Massachusetts*. The Blueprint recommends a campaign to improve overall health and fitness, with strategies for every sector of our economy to take leadership and improve both our health and our economic well-being.

To read the full report, visit www.nehi.net.

SOLUTION: A BLUEPRINT FOR WELLNESS

NEHI and the Boston Foundation believe that **the time has come to address rising health care costs and preventable chronic disease** through a campaign to improve health and fitness, building on the initial progress with the Commonwealth's *Mass in Motion* campaign.

This effort should include the following sectors and strategies:

Schools

- Lawmakers and educators should replace unhealthy foods with nutritious options in schools.
- Educators and lawmakers should reconcile health promotion with academic requirements.

Municipalities

- The state's transportation strategy should promote physical activity over use of automobiles.
- Housing policy should create more walkable, fitness-friendly communities.

State Government

- The Commonwealth should encourage adoption of wellness incentives, such as those in the state's health insurance reform law.

Payers

- Massachusetts payers should form a coalition to test comprehensive approaches to promoting health and wellness interventions through health plans.

Employers

- Employer associations and the state should promote awareness of best practices in employee health management.
- Small- and mid-sized employers should work with health insurers to bring evidence-based health promotion to fully-insured firms.

The Food Industry

- Supermarkets and restaurants should begin a dialogue on voluntary food labeling.
- The Commonwealth should end the current sales tax exemption for snack foods.

Physicians

- Physicians and payers should identify opportunities to reimburse physicians for promoting healthy behaviors. The state's initiative to reform health care payment provides an ideal vehicle.

Philanthropies

- Grantmakers should continue to identify ways to share best practices and optimize health promotion funding with other organizations.

The Media/Opinion Leaders

- Organizations promoting wellness should pool resources and reinforce their messages.
- Massachusetts' 'newsmaker cluster' of experts in health and wellness should serve as an important partner in efforts to communicate positive messages around diet and fitness.

Health promotion and the prevention of chronic illness are the missing links in our efforts to contain costs while providing high quality, affordable and sustainable health care for all. NEHI and TBF believe that the time has come to forge those missing links by employing these strategies.

About NEHI

The New England Healthcare Institute (NEHI) is an independent, not-for-profit research and health policy organization dedicated to transforming health care for the benefit of patients and their families. Together with its membership of committed health care leaders, NEHI brings an objective, collaborative and fresh voice to health policy. Visit www.nehi.net.



About The Boston Foundation

The Boston Foundation, Greater Boston's community foundation, is one of the oldest and largest community foundations in the nation, with assets of more than \$830 million. It serves as a major civic leader, provider of information, convener, and sponsor of special initiatives designed to address the community's and region's most pressing challenges. For more information, visit www.tbf.org

