



New England Healthcare Institute

# The Boston Paradox: Lots of Health Care, Not Enough Health

## FINDINGS: LOTS OF HEALTH CARE, NOT ENOUGH HEALTH

Life expectancy in the Greater Boston area is above the national average. Indeed, Massachusetts claims one of the lowest levels of “premature mortality” (death before age 75) and infant mortality in the nation.

However, the obesity epidemic and rising chronic illness (e.g. Type II diabetes mellitus) are overwhelming the nation; and Massachusetts and the Greater Boston area have not been spared. Poor nutrition and inadequate fitness have contributed to over half of the adult population being overweight or obese. Obesity among adults increased by 64% in less than a decade.

This trend threatens to reverse progress that Greater Boston has made in reducing the impact of heart disease, and it directly correlates to the increase in Type II diabetes. *Unless preventative measures are taken, obesity-related illness alone will drive up health care spending, thus starving investment in critical determinant areas such as education, creating a vicious cycle of illness and disinvestment.*

## IMPACT: A VICIOUS CYCLE

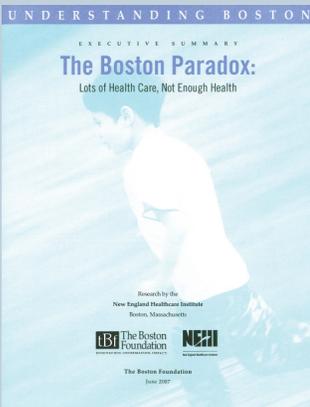
People who develop chronic diseases are at risk for serious and costly complications. Thus, as the tide of preventable disease rises, *less* funding is available to spend on *prevention* of such conditions -- for while chronic illness is *preventable* or *manageable*, it is not necessarily simple to do so.

Research shows that the dominant influences on public health include education, income, and personal behavior. Investments that increase educational attainment accelerate the creation of jobs, and encourage healthy behaviors (such as tobacco avoidance) that improve health, and therefore reduce health care demand, over time. Nevertheless, health-related spending is disproportionately concentrated on treating patients with severe illnesses.

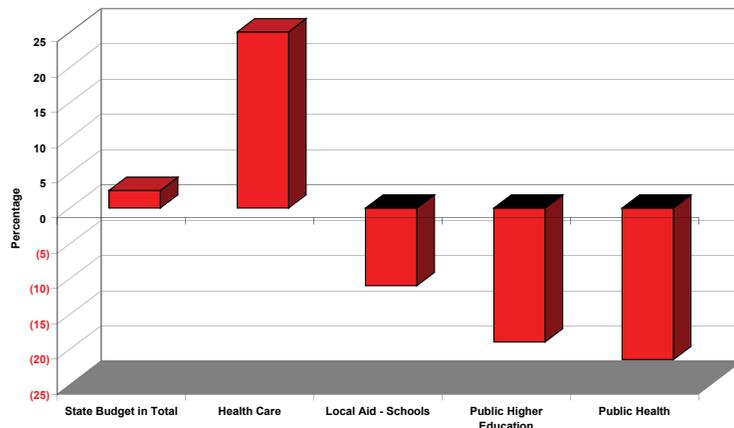
### Study in Brief:

*The Boston Paradox*, a report published by the New England Healthcare Institute (NEHI) in collaboration with The Boston Foundation, examines numerous indicators of health, health care, and economic competitiveness in the Greater Boston area. It also examines the role of the health care and life science industries in the region’s economy, juxtaposing for the first time the state of the area’s physical wellbeing with the state of its economic wellbeing.

To read the full report, visit [www.nehi.net](http://www.nehi.net).



net Change in Real Spending  
Massachusetts Budget - FY 2001 through 2007



From: New England Healthcare Institute estimates from Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation Data.

## IMPACT: THE MISMATCH

### 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](http://www.nehi.net).

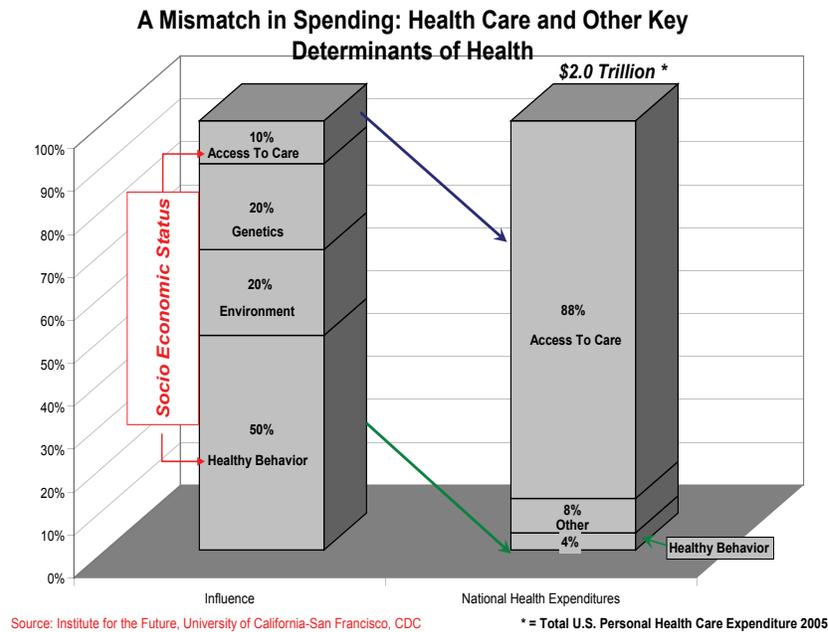


### About The Boston Foundation

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](http://www.tbf.org)



Access to healthcare is but one determinant of health status. Research demonstrates that *personal behaviors* have a much greater influence on health over a lifetime. Environmental and genetic factors are also important determinants of health. Yet our national expenditure on increasing access is *far greater* than our national expenditure on the other critical determinants of health. Nearly 90% of personal health care expenditures in the U.S. are spent on direct care; much less is spent on promoting healthy behaviors or decreasing environmental risks.



Treatment of chronic illness is draining our health care dollars, and not enough resources are being invested in chronic disease prevention and management, reduction of environmental hazards, and educational attainment. Spending on access is crowding out available funds.

## THE NEXT STEP: HEALTHY PEOPLE IN A HEALTHY ECONOMY

This is both an *immense challenge* and a *great opportunity* for Greater Boston. The region has unique and powerful tools with which to respond to the rising tide of preventable chronic disease, starting with *innovation*. By focusing on the interconnectivity of health and economy, and encouraging a spirit of far-reaching collaboration, Greater Boston can lead the way in reversing a troubling increase in chronic preventable disease, and strengthen its own economy along the way.

In partnership with The Boston Foundation, NEHI is now convening a diverse array of groups in the region, including employers, employer associations, health plans, health care providers, and specialized health service vendors. Together, these collaborators will construct and promote a "Healthy People/Healthy Economy" initiative, which will outline an overarching strategy to reduce the impact of health risk behaviors, especially obesity-related behaviors, on the region's public health and economy.