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PRESS RELEASE

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To Advance Equity, State Must Lead on Collecting Racial and Ethnic Health Data, Analyzing Disparities, New Massachusetts Taxpayer Foundation Analysis Finds

BOSTON, January 11, 2022— To truly advance its equity goals, Massachusetts must take a leadership role in collecting and analyzing racial and ethnic health disparities, a new Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation report suggests. The report underlines how Massachusetts must improve data collection and reporting requirements across health agencies to ensure inequities are identified and addressed more holistically.

The new MTF analysis builds off its landmark May 2021 report, [“Closing the Racial Divide in the U.S. and Massachusetts: A Baseline Analysis.”](#)

As lawmakers develop health care reforms and decide where to allocate billions of federal dollars and state tax revenues, they must ensure that underserved populations benefit. To ensure equity, the first step is to identify and clearly document the inequities, the report notes. To address this problem, the report makes four main recommendations to state policymakers:

- **Release an annual state health equity report.** The Center for Health Information and Analysis (CHIA), working with the Department of Public Health (DPH), MassHealth, the Health Policy Council (HPC), and Massachusetts Health Quality Partners (MHQP), should issue an annual report on racial and ethnic health disparities in Massachusetts with year-over-year comparisons. The report should include measures of health care quality for children and adolescents.

- **Work with the health care community to improve data collection.** The Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS), MassHealth, and CHIA should announce plans to phase in and enforce statewide reporting requirements for race, ethnicity, language and disability (RELD) and sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) data to supersede differing standards from health care organizations and municipalities. EOHHS should also partner with community leaders and trusted community organizations to educate patients and consumers about why collecting and sharing this data is essential.

- **Release an updated health equity data set for independent research and analysis.** The state should publish a continuously updated and anonymized health equity data set in open formats that can be retrieved, downloaded, indexed, and searched by the public to measure racial and ethnic health care disparities.

- **Support collaboration to identify, prioritize and eliminate health disparities.** EOHHS should collaborate with expert organizations, health systems and academia that have created health equity training, certificates, and fellowships to offer learning opportunities. It should also share best practices to identify, prioritize and eliminate disparities.

The report further finds that data collection requirements and standards vary between a variety of state and federal agencies, leading to incomplete records and making it difficult to track health inequities across Massachusetts consistently over time.

“Eliminating racial and ethnic health care disparities will lead to a healthier Massachusetts, a stronger economy and clear progress toward the shared imperative of a more equitable society,” said **MTF President Eileen McAnneny**. “This analysis provides a clear roadmap for state policymakers to build on past work by collecting and analyzing data in a more transparent manner to drive accelerate measurable progress.”

“Health equity is a cornerstone of fairness, in any way you can define the term,” said **Dr. Kiame Mahaniah, Chief Executive Officer of the Lynn Community Health Center and a member of MTF’s health care working group**. “Collecting the data uniformly and presenting an annual equity report, in order to know where the system needs intervention, is a basic building block to eliminating health care disparities”

“To meet our goals to achieve equity and reduce health disparities in the communities we serve we must translate our intentions to actions at state and health system levels,” said **Rosa Colon-Kolacko, PhD. Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion officer at Wellforce**. “There is no real path to achieve health equity without accurate and complete data by demographic characteristics, language preferences, disability, LGBTQ, common standards and leadership commitment.”

“Massachusetts is a leader in health care performance and yet we trail in many measures of health equity,” said **Barbra Rabson, President and CEO of Massachusetts Health Quality Partners (MHQP) and a member of MTF’s health care working group**. “We know we

can improve health outcomes, but that starts with data that can inform us on progress towards health equity.”

McAnney emphasized: “The findings in this report regarding data collection and reporting are vital to improved health outcomes for all populations and communities across the state. The benefits of achieving health equity to the state’s social and economic future are considerable and will accrue to us all.”

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Founded in 1932, the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation (MTF) is widely recognized as the state's premier public policy organization dealing with state and local fiscal, tax, and economic policies. MTF provides public and private sector decision makers with accurate, timely, unbiased research and constructive solutions that drive public policy in order to strengthen the State's finances and position the Commonwealth for long-term growth. Our vision is a Commonwealth with economic opportunity for all.