MetroCommon × 2050
Policy Recommendations

Equity of Wealth and Health
Reverse the rising rate of chronic diseases, particularly among populations experiencing health inequities
Strategy 1
Help all people achieve a healthy start in life: improve health outcomes for both those giving birth and infants.

▲ Action 1.1: Build a more diverse health workforce and require health practitioners to address racism and racial disparities in care settings.
Example legislation includes the Anti-Racism in Public Health Act, introduced by Senator Warren and Congresswoman Pressley, which would promote anti-racist care and public health interventions, and California’s AB 464, which requires bias training for perinatal professionals. At the local level, a growing number of cities and counties are issuing declarations of racism as a public health crisis and implementing strategies to address racism across systems.

▲ Action 1.2: Expand access to full-spectrum pregnancy care, including coverage of post-partum care until one-year after birth or end of pregnancy. Pass legislation to address high out-of-pocket medical costs and coverage limitations, such as those on midwife or doula care, that undermine access to evidence-based pregnancy care and create financial hardships that disproportionately impact women. H.1196/S.673, An Act ensuring access to full spectrum pregnancy care, would require all MA regulated plans to cover pregnancy-related care. Massachusetts’s current Section 1115 Medicaid waiver expires in 2022. This provides an opportunity to expand post-partum health coverage with the next waiver.

▲ Action 1.3: Expand access to home visiting programs for expecting parents and families with infants and young children. Current Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) funding allows the program to serve only a small fraction of families that could benefit. The federal government can expand this funding through the program’s next authorization. The state can follow the example of other states in supplementing home visiting funding and in assisting programs in securing insurance reimbursement. Local communities can also play an important role by establishing stand-alone or regional programs, coordinating services relevant to home visiting, and addressing access gaps for marginalized communities, including immigrant families.

Action Area: Equity of Wealth and Health

Recommendation:
Reverse the rising rate of chronic diseases, particularly among populations experiencing health inequities
Strategy 2
Invest in and expand access to programs that support families’ basic needs.

- **Action 2.1:** Adopt universal free school meals to give every student the nutrition they need during the school day. *H.714/S.314, An Act relative to universal school meals*, filed by Representative Andy Vargas (Haverhill) and Senator Sal DiDomenico (Everett), would ensure all children are offered school meals (breakfast and lunch) at no cost to students or their families. This would be accomplished by maximizing federal funds available to schools participating in the National School Lunch or Breakfast Program and supplementing with state funds.

- **Action 2.2:** Direct more rental vouchers to families with children and eliminate barriers to the development of new homes for families to improve housing stability. Taking a preventative approach by increasing the overall availability of housing assistance and directing more vouchers to support family housing stability can have long-term positive effects on the health of children and their caregivers.¹ ²

- **Action 2.3:** Facilitate access to mental health services and invest in opportunities for social connection. Invest in two-generational approaches to social emotional support, providing adequate funding for mental health services targeted to children, youth, and their caregivers. Incentivize the development of housing with social connectivity aspects (common spaces, courtyards, and resident services coordination) and implement diverse measures, including joint-use agreements, to develop intergenerational community spaces in school buildings and recreation and senior centers.

- **Action 2.4:** Dismantle structural barriers to immigrants’ integration and access to vital health-promoting resources. Begin by passing the Work and Family Mobility Act, the Safe Communities Act, and bills to expand MassHealth and in-state tuition eligibility to immigrant children and youth. Recognize language access as a critical link to health-supporting resources and opportunities by leveraging various sources of funding for English classes (ESOL), including workforce and childcare development funds. Make language accessibility a priority in government services and decision-making processes by investing in adequate resources for translation, interpretation, and outreach.

Strategy 3
Foster a caregiver economy with dignity and access for all.

- **Action 3.1:** Increase reimbursement for family childcare providers and in-home caregivers, creating mechanisms to support higher pay and benefits for care workers. Increase reimbursement rates for in-home health care through Medicaid and other public and private payers, with requirements that employers improve wages, benefits, training, and other pillars of job quality. Establish childcare affordability through sliding scale subsidies that require no family to pay more than seven percent of their income on childcare and bedrock funding that allocates funding to childcare providers based on capacity (rather than attendance), as long as providers accept families that use subsidies and follow new guidance on educator salary and benefits.

¹ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (2019). *Research Shows Rental Assistance Reduces Hardship and Provides Platform to Expand Opportunity for Low-Income Families*
² Housing Matters (2019). *How Housing Affects Children’s Outcomes*
Action 3.2: Strengthen and expand tax credit programs to alleviate financial hardships for family caregivers, including those assisting with the care of adults. Make the enhanced Child Tax Credit (CTC) and Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) benefits in the stimulus bill permanent. H.2871/S.1852, An Act providing a guaranteed minimum income to all Massachusetts families would enhance the state’s EITC program, increasing the state match to 50 percent of the federal EITC, establishing a minimum $2400 credit for every eligible household, and expanding the credit to unpaid caregivers of adults and individuals filing with an Individual Tax Identification Number (ITIN).

Action 3.3: Help family caregivers balance work and caregiving responsibilities by requiring employers to provide workers with greater flexibility and more predictable, stable hours. If adopted, the Massachusetts Fair Workweek Bill (H.1974/S.1236) would provide workers greater stability for themselves and their families by requiring employers to give advance notice of employee schedules, predictable pay, and adequate rest between shifts, and to offer existing employees new shifts before hiring new staff.