

Community Health Compass

Navigating Through Community Health Together

Annual Community Health Institute (CHI) Conference



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Dear Community Health Partner



The Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers (the Mass League) is excited to announce the launch of our new quarterly newsletter—*Community Health Compass*. This valuable resource will serve as a platform to share important updates and insights in the world of community health, and particularly from a community health center perspective.

At the Mass League, we believe in the power of collaboration and knowledge-sharing, and this newsletter—*appropriately with the shared acronym CHC*—will be a vital tool in connect-

ing us and empowering our continued efforts to ensure access to quality and affordable healthcare, regardless of ability to pay. History provides us with a lens into how historical events, policies, and social structures have shaped health disparities and inequalities.

This comprehensive edition also complements other publications that are distributed from the Mass League you may receive that are more service-oriented and specific in focus.

We can't wait to share this exciting new publication with you. Welcome to the first edition!

Warm regards,

Michael Curry

Michael Curry, Esq., President and CEO
Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers

INAUGURAL EDITION MARCH 2024

In this issue...

[From the President and CEO](#)

[Making Wave](#)

[Empowering Access to Healthcare](#)

[Specialized Support EHR Population Health Management in Diabetes and Chronic Diseases](#)

[Empowering Through History](#)

[Empowering Under-Resourced Communities](#)

[Latest Updates on Massachusetts Employment Laws](#)

[Empowerment Through a Unified Voice](#)

[Unlocking Potential](#)

[Impact of Environmental Events on Farmworker Communities](#)

[Empowering Through Research](#)

[Paid Field Placements in Community Health](#)

The mission of the Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers is to promote population health equity for all through leadership and programs supporting community health centers and members in achieving their goals of accessible, quality, comprehensive, and community responsive health care.

Massachusetts League
of Community Health Centers

Friday, June 7, 2024
6 pm — 11 pm



The Westin Copley Place, Boston
10 Huntington Avenue

For more than 50 years, the Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers has worked tirelessly to expand locally accessible, high-quality care to more than one million Massachusetts residents, while representing our 52 community health center members. The Mass League and its members have been making waves: producing innovative solutions for improving health outcomes; reducing costs across the health system; advocating for policy that supports the health safety net; and ensuring health equity in all corners of the Commonwealth. We do this through ongoing analysis of and advocacy for issues impacting health centers, their patients, and communities, as well as by providing technical support to address their workforce development, clinical quality, service expansion, and information technology needs. While 2023 was not without its challenges and we face serious headwinds in 2024, we have a lot to celebrate at the Mass League. **On Friday, June 7, 2024, 6:00 - 11:00 pm, at The Westin Copley Place Boston**, we will celebrate accomplishments and the well-deserving community health center awardees at our **annual awards gala**, appropriately themed **Making Waves**—the largest yearly gathering of community health centers in Massachusetts. Please support us by considering a **Gala Sponsorship** that will help advance the critically important work of this association in Massachusetts, as we strive to expand access and pursue health equity. You can also join the celebration by **Purchasing Tickets**. Additional Information can be found on our website at **2024 Awards Gala - Making Waves**.

This year's dedicated and committed awardees include:

2024 State Public Service Award

State Representative Aaron Michlewitz
Chair, House Committee on Ways & Means

Community Health Center Clinician Awards

Cynthia Slaga, NP, School-Based Health Center
Lowell Community Health Center

Stephanie Billings, MD, Family Medicine
Holyoke Health Center

Joseph M. Smith Community Board Member Award

Joseph Scardino
Family Health Center of Worcester

Community Health Center CEO Award

Guale Valdez, President & CEO
Mattapan Community Health Center

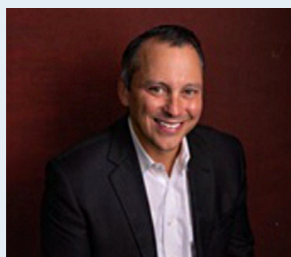
Community Health Center Employee Awards

Jessica DaRosa, Director of Operations
Harvard Street Neighborhood Health Center

Joanne Mazar, Chief Human Resources Officer
Community Health Center of Cape Cod

Edward M. Kennedy Founder Award

Sue Joss, CEO
Brockton Neighborhood Health Center



Aaron Michlewitz



Cynthia Slaga



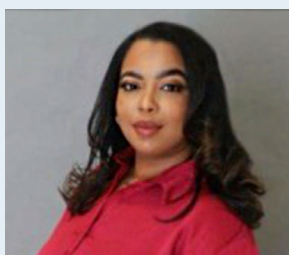
Stephanie Billings



Joseph Scardino



Guale Valdez



Jessica DaRosa



Joanne Mazar



Sue Joss

Empowering Access to Healthcare: Mass League Collaborates to Support Newly Arrived Migrants and Families



On August 8, 2023, Governor Maura Healey's Administration declared a state of emergency in Massachusetts due to an influx of newly arrived migrants. The Mass League, along with state agencies and other non-profits, was activated to respond. Currently, there are over 7,500 families in emergency shelters, with 3,745 of them being migrants, refugees, or asylum seekers. For current statistics, visit the [state's Emergency Assistance dashboard](#). The MA Department of Public Health (MDPH), in collaboration with Uber, launched an Uber for Health Business account with \$10,000 credits. These credits allow community health centers to arrange rides for newly arrived migrant patients without any cost. The League's support has been beneficial, providing transportation to medical appointments and supporting health equity efforts. Massachusetts community health centers can request rides by emailing the necessary information to MDPH. Uber rides have been initiated a significant amount of time since the program's launch in August, with more than \$7,000 in credits still available.

*"The League's Uber transportation support of newly arrived migrants and sheltering families to and from appointments here at Codman has been a game-changer," said **Anthony Stankiewicz, Chief Advancement Officer, Codman Square Health Center**. "Our new arrivals face daunting issues daily, and not having to worry about how to get to an appointment at Codman Square Health Center for necessary medical attention is one less concern for them, while supporting Codman's ongoing efforts to address health equity and expand access to care,"*

This account is open to all Massachusetts community health centers, regardless of federally qualified or hospital-licensed status. Prior to using the account, we ask that you or your staff email Tina Wright, twright@massleague.org, or Jack Broderick, jbroderick@massleague.org, to indicate that you intend to use the funds. **To request a ride to or from your health center, the requestor will need to email the information below to dph.eashelter@mass.gov:**

provide the Date, First Name, Time of Appointment, Time of Pick up, Hotel or Shelter, Address, Room Number, Best contact number (needs to be a US-based cellular number), Destination location, and Type of Appointment (i.e., initial/urgent care, primary care or follow-up care):

MDPH will then confirm that an Uber has been initiated and pass along the driver's name, make of vehicle, license plate, and time of arrival, which can be relayed to the patient. If additional troubleshooting is needed, MDPH has created a phone number monitored from 9 AM to 5 PM, Monday to Friday; however, the email address goes to multiple MDPH coordinators who can also be reached by the email above. Of the original donation, more than \$7,000 credits are still available.

Are you a Community Health Center seeking specialized support for electronic health record (EHR) population health management in diabetes and chronic diseases?



The **Clinical Health Affairs Department** is dedicated to supporting health center care teams in their mission to enhance and seamlessly integrate patient care. The overarching objectives are centered around a comprehensive examination of

equity and disparities, alongside focused interventions. Within the department, we are committed to optimizing efficiency, as well as standardizing workflows, standing orders, policies and procedures in order to achieve a higher level of integration among health center services and care team members. Noteworthy focus areas include Women's Health; equitable quality improvement for chronic diseases; screening and prevention metrics; effective multidisciplinary care teams; anti-racist practice education for clinical leaders; and the reinforcement of the Patient-Centered Medical Home model. As we adapt to evolving payment methodologies, our efforts extend to expanding access to behavioral health services through

culturally congruent pathways and integrating oral health seamlessly into primary care and behavioral health.

In addition to these core initiatives, the clinical team actively engages in a variety of current activities aligned with our department's goals. These include ongoing participation in the review of disparities reporting, offering technical assistance for depression screening, spearheading substance use disorders/treatment/recovery initiatives, and supporting community health worker roles through various programs. To augment our commitment to continuous improvement, we participate in trainings and collaborations, such as the collaborative learning sessions and infection control forums, which contribute significantly to the ongoing enhancement of the quality and inclusivity of patient care. The team also hosts a series of forums fostering educational knowledge and peer-to-peer collaborations, covering diverse areas such as pharmacy, nurse management, behavioral health, dental care, eye care, QI/nurse manager, medical directors, pediatric leads, SUD champions, diabetes champions, and more.

For additional information, contact Susan Dargon-Hart, LICSW, Senior Vice President of Clinical Health Affairs, at sdagonhart@massleague.org.

Diabetes Mini-Grant Program Opportunity

A collaborative initiative between the Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers (MLCHC) and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH)



Are you a community health center seeking specialized support for electronic health record (EHR) population health management in diabetes and chronic diseases? Five health centers will have the opportunity to participate in this mini-grant program. Participating health centers will be awarded \$5,000.

Participation includes:

- Two technical assistance sessions with the Mass League
- Opportunities to attend learning sessions and connect with peers
- Support in leveraging EHR tools more efficiently
- Assistance in a process-mapping exercise to better manage workflows for patients with diabetes
- Access to the Mass League's Diabetes and Hypertension Champion online communities

How to apply:

- Fill out our diabetes mini-grant interest form by Friday, March 29, 2024
- To access the interest form, visit www.surveymonkey.com/r/8NRM67V or you can [Click Here](#)

For more information:

- If you have any questions about the program, email Jessica at JSaadEsposito@massleague.org
- To learn more about the mass league, visit massleague.org



Empowering Through History: Celebrations of Black History Month and Women's History Month at the Mass League



The **Mass League's Diversity, Equity, Belonging, and Inclusion (DEIB) Program** believes in the power of initiatives that tackle critical social issues. They provide valuable opportunities to gain insight to and explore solutions that are directly relevant to community health. By actively engaging in discussions and events centered around diversity, equity, and inclusion, we can collectively work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable healthcare environment for all.

Through our programming, we work to foster a sense of belonging and empower individuals to contribute to the advancement of community health. In honor of **Black History Month**, the Mass League organized a series of **DEIB Discussion Group** sessions focused on the critical issue of food injustice faced by Black Americans. These sessions focused on exploring solutions and strategies to address this pressing issue. Additionally, the **Mass League's Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) Employee Resource Group (ERG)** showcased informative slides in both our Boston and Worcester offices, highlighting and commemorating Black historical figures. As an expression of appreciation, staff members were gifted Black History Month themed wristbands and keychains.

Furthermore, the BIPOC ERG arranged an exciting in-person watch party for the **MLCHC Black History Month Presenta-**

tion: Quantum Leap—a comprehensive presentation that explores Anti-Black racism in America from 1619 to today. The distinguished speaker for this event was the **President and CEO of the Mass League, Michael Curry, Esq.** The presentation was also made accessible virtually for community health center staff, resulting in an impressive turnout of over 100 attendees.

As we transition into the month of March, the focus now shifts to celebrating **Women's History Month**. The **Mass League Women's ERG** has planned an engaging Lunch & Learning Session, dedicated to highlighting and honoring women who champion equity, diversity, and equality. This internal session will focus on educating and inspiring staff members on the remarkable contributions made by women throughout history.

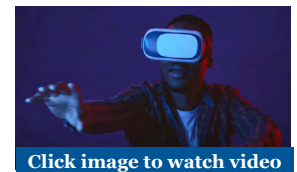
Additionally, the Women's ERG will be displaying informative slides in both our Boston and Worcester offices, paying tribute to influential women historical figures. This visual display serves as a reminder of the profound impact women have had in shaping our society.

To learn more about Mass League's DEIB Program or to request support with your DEIB initiatives, please contact **Kirby Valentin, MPH, Grants and Contracts Manager/DEIB Lead** at kvalentin@massleague.org.

Empowering Under-Resourced Communities: Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers Continues to Promote COVID-19 Vaccination

Although the impact of COVID-19 on hospitalizations and deaths has decreased compared to the earlier years of the pandemic, it still exists. Over the past four years, the **Community Health Initiatives Program** has been actively involved in the **"Engaging Community Health Workers (CHWs) to Increase COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution in Historically Under-Resourced Communities"** Project. In collaboration with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, we have worked closely with health centers to address the changing needs of their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. While adapting their priorities to support frontline staff in providing care and assistance, their overarching goal remains focused on educating historically under-resourced communities and empowering them to make informed decisions for themselves and their families.

To continue their critical work, the Mass League has created videos to spread awareness that COVID still exists and the importance of the COVID-19 vaccination. We are encouraging health centers to utilize these videos to further amplify the message.



The Mass League hopes to engage and educate a broader audience, ultimately contributing to the overall goal of promoting vaccinations and ensuring the well-being of under-resourced communities. For additional information about this initiative, contact Nicole Simpson, MS, Director of Community Health Initiatives at CHWInitiatives@massleague.org.

We encourage you to spread awareness that 1) COVID still exists and 2) the importance of the COVID-19 vaccination and encourage your health center team to utilize these videos tools to further amplify the message.



Empowering Workforce: Latest Updates on Massachusetts Employment Laws

Community health center employers should be aware of several new employment laws that recently took effect at the start of the new year. HR leaders should lookout for a session at the Mass League's CHI Conference in May covering various topics relevant to human resources. This session will include the Boston Area Office Director of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), **Feng Kenneth An, JD**, as well as other attorneys and staff from the EEOC, and will be hosted and facilitated by the Mass League's Legal and Compliance Department. The EEOC representatives will discuss best practices to avoid violating Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as amended, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and other federal laws protecting employees from discrimination in the workplace. The EEOC will also invite questions from the program attendees.

The Massachusetts Legislature has also introduced a series of bills requiring employers across the Commonwealth to establish and revise their policies and practices, if enacted. Below are some of the critical updates for you to be aware of:

Paid Family Medical Leave (PFML):

In November 2023, the Massachusetts Department of Family and Medical Leave (DFML) announced changes to the PFML law. Before the November 2023 change, Massachusetts employees generally could not supplement or "top off" their PFML benefits with employer-provided, accrued benefits, like paid time off (PTO). This rule was met with substantial confusion and frustration among employers and employees alike, as it meant that an employee could not use PTO to supplement the difference between their regular pay and the weekly PFML cap (with some exceptions for private plans, which allowed topping off).

Following the above change, employees can supplement or "top off" their PFML benefits with any employer-provided, accrued PTO. Specifically, an employee can supplement the weekly capped PFML benefits with their PTO, up to a total amount equal to the employee's average weekly wage. Calculated by the DFML, the average weekly wage is the average amount the employee earned per week in the two quarters in which the employee earned the most.

In addition, effective January 1, 2024, the PFML maximum weekly benefit and contribution rates have changed. First, the maximum weekly employee benefit has increased from \$1,129.82 to \$1,149.90. Second, the employer contribution rates have increased: for employers with 25 or more covered individuals, the contribution rate increased from 0.63% to 0.88% of eligible employee wages; for employers with fewer than 25 covered individuals, the contribution rate increased from 0.318% to 0.46%.

Pending Legislation:

- a. **Minimum Wage:** House Bill 1925 and Senate Bill 1200 seek to raise the state minimum wage from \$15 an hour to \$20 an hour over five (5) years. The 5-year period would end on January 1, 2028. The Bill's justification is that the inflation rate and associated cost of living increases demonstrate that the current minimum wage is too low. Unlike in other years, there is no accompanying ballot initiative to raise the minimum wage, so the issue will remain with the Legislature and not appear on the November 2024 ballot.
- b. **Overtime for Healthcare Workers:** House Bill 1838 prohibits employers from mandating overtime, except in emergency conditions when a patient's life may be at stake. Even under this exception, healthcare employees would be required to make a good-faith effort to have such work covered voluntarily.
- c. **Pay Transparency:** Pay Transparency Laws have been passed nationwide and appear to continue in 2024. In 2023, Illinois, New York, Rhode Island, Washington, California, and Hawaii joined the growing list of states that will require more pay transparency. In Massachusetts, the House and Senate have recently passed their versions of pay transparency bills, with a consolidated bill expected to be sent to Governor Healey in the coming months. If, as expected, the Governor signs the legislation into law, employers with 25 or more employees in Massachusetts will be required to disclose pay ranges on job postings and to provide pay range information to current employees, among other requirements.
- d. **Treble Damages Avoidance:** House Bill 1944 and Senate Bill 1182 seek to clarify the process and standards for employers to pay out any wages due to an employee at the time of termination. Under the Massachusetts Wage Act and the Supreme Judicial Court's decision in *Reuter v. City of Methuen*, 489 Mass 465 (2022), an employer can be liable for treble damages for failing to pay employees their final wages and accrued vacation pay on the last day of employment. Under the terms of this Bill, employees making post-employment termination claims seeking to recover unpaid compensation and treble damages must first make a written demand to the employer specifying those sums. The employer would have 15 days to respond to or cure the employee's demand without incurring statutory treble damages. If an employer can make a good-faith argument that the market is unfounded, a court cannot award statutory or treble damages.

Empowerment through a Unified Voice: Health Centers Gearing Up for State House Day



Calling all CHC Advocates and Friends: Save the Date for this year's Mass League State House Day Event!

State House Day will be held on **June 4, 2024, from 10AM-3PM** in-person at the Massachusetts State House. The League is returning to a pre-COVID event approach that includes a legislative and advocacy briefing, tabling by health center exhibitors and the presentation of health center champion awards to legislative supporters.

This is a great opportunity for the health center movement in Massachusetts to show up in force and educate policymakers about the challenges and opportunities facing our network. We are excited to see you there! Breakfast and lunch will be provided.

Unlocking Potential: Empowering Healthcare Providers through the MA Repay Behavioral Health and Primary Care Student Loan Repayment Program

By providing financial assistance to healthcare professionals who choose to work in underserved areas or with vulnerable populations, the MA Repay Program plays an important role in supporting health equity in Massachusetts. These loan repayment programs empower healthcare providers to pursue careers in areas where their services are needed.

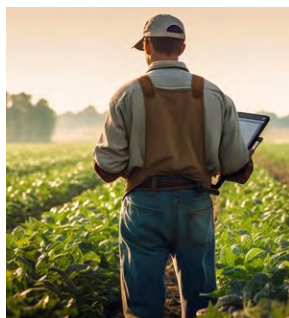
We are excited to announce that the awardees of the [MA Repay Behavioral Health and Primary Care Student Loan Repayment Program](#) will receive their first student loan repayment award in August of 2024. These awardees are mental health, primary care, and substance use disorder treatment professionals who

have committed to, in most cases, four years of service. Over 350 awardees are employed by community health centers.

The [MA Repay program](#) offers student loan repayment awards to eligible professionals who complete a service commitment to their field. By doing so, it aims to reduce the financial burden on healthcare staff, address critical workforce shortages, and make quality health care more accessible in Massachusetts.

MA Repay is managed by the Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers on behalf of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services. If you have questions, please contact 833-627-3729 or ma-repay@massleague.org.

Impact of Environmental Events on Farmworker Communities



This summer, states in the Northeast grappled with a unique and concerning challenge – the convergence of wildfire smoke and flooding, both of which have significantly impacted farms and communities in Connecticut and Massachusetts. As climate change reshapes our environment, understanding and addressing these dual threats becomes increasingly important.

Wildfire Smoke and its Toll on Agriculture

While the West has long been associated with devastating wildfires, the Northeast is now experiencing our own share of this crisis. This year, parts of Connecticut and Massachusetts witnessed the effects of wildfire smoke containing harmful pollutants, including particulate matter and toxic gases. These pollutants can drift for miles and settle on crops, contaminating them. This has potential health implications for consumers and the workers who tend to these crops. Exposure can lead to respiratory and cardiovascular issues, especially for those spending prolonged hours outdoors.

Flooding, A Growing Concern

Flooding, too, has become more frequent in the region due to changing weather patterns. Farms are especially vulnerable to the devastating effects of flooding, as they are often in low-lying

areas near rivers or streams. Flood waters can erode soil, destroy crops, and damage infrastructure like irrigation systems and barns. Flooded fields can become breeding grounds for water-borne diseases that threaten crops and farmworkers. These disasters also impact productivity, reducing profits and can result in wage losses for farmworkers.

Farmworkers, The Unsung Heroes

Amid these challenges, it's crucial to recognize the resilience of farmworkers who continue to work tirelessly to ensure a stable food supply. These unsung heroes often work in harsh conditions, facing both immediate risks from smoke inhalation and long-term health issues due to repeated exposure.

Efforts are underway to address these issues. Some farm owners are adopting advanced irrigation techniques to mitigate the impacts of drought and flood, while also exploring ways to protect crops from the damaging effects of wildfire smoke.

Our Response

We, and our Partner Agencies, work closely with farm owners, and farmworkers to address these challenges through ongoing communication, outreach, health education, emergency preparedness efforts, provision of PPE and supplies, and increasing access to primary care services. Raising awareness about the health risks and resources is a crucial part of our work. With the effects of climate change growing, this is sure to be an issue that will require increased attention and a strategic response for the foreseeable future.

Empowering Through Research: Institute for Health Equity Research, Evaluation, & Policy Explores Long COVID and Substance Use and Harm Reduction Care

The **Institute for Health Equity Research, Evaluation, & Policy (IHE)** at the Mass League promotes and engages in community-driven research, evaluation, and public policy to achieve health equity and move toward everyone experiencing just and equitable health status. In January, the IHE welcomed **Dionyssios Mintzopoulos, Ph.D.**, the institute's Data Scientist, who contributes scientific and analytic expertise.

IHE's Executive Director, **Cheryl Clark, MD**, delivered a legislative briefing [on Long COVID and health equity in the Commonwealth](#) on January 30, 2024. View the [Long COVID briefing on YouTube](#).

Damian Archer, MD, CEO of [Outer Cape Health Services](#), shared his expertise on health equity leadership in an interview with IHE. Dr. Archer said: "I think it is a privilege to be able to do this type of work because there's no amount of money that would ever meet the satisfaction, I get from feeling like I'm meeting my purpose every day." Please read [the interview online](#).

[Caring Health Center](#) in Springfield is partnering with IHE on a research project to improve access to Substance Use and Harm Reduction care. This [research study is funded by RIZE MA](#).

Fostering Empowerment in Partnership with MGB: Mass General Brigham Paid Field Placements in Community Health



The Mass League is administering the **Equitable Care Collaborative's Behavioral Health Internship Pipeline Program (BHIPP)** in partnership with Mass General Brigham (MGB). The goal of this program is to expand the provider pipeline to attract diverse, qualified, and culturally competent Social Workers, Mental Health Counselors, and Marriage and Family Therapists in their final year of their graduate program by providing paid field placements in community health centers (CHC). Each awarded student intern will receive a stipend for

accepting placement within a CHC and will participate in learning community sessions, inclusive of a final project presentation focused on equitable care.

The Behavioral Health Internship Pipeline Program (BHIPP) aims to create a pipeline targeted at a diverse population of behavioral health providers who are completing their graduate degrees in preparation for becoming a licensed social worker, licensed mental health counselor, or licensed marriage and family therapist. This program intends to root behavioral health program graduates in community health center (CHC) settings early in their careers. As a part of this program, the Mass League will partner with CHCs to support students prior to graduation via a one-year \$15,000 paid internship, learning community participation, and a final project presentation.

*"BHIPP has evolved dynamically since its inception three years ago," says **Tinamarie Fioroni, LMHC, Senior Director of Workforce Optimization at the Mass League**. "Our responsiveness to the needs of health centers and our commitment to equity have been instrumental in this evolution. Thanks to both organizations' commitment to the Mass League's vision, we have been able to enhance our impact."*



13
14
15
16

Mass League's [Community Health Institute Conference](#)



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7

Mass League's [2024 Awards Gala](#)



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