

Press Release

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MASSACHUSETTS EMPLOYER HEALTH COALITION KICKS OFF ACTIVITIES, RELEASES NEW DATA, ANNOUNCES REGIONAL LISTENING SESSIONS AT EMPLOYER FORUM

*Coalition Releases Select Employee Engagement Resources for Employers to Deploy within
Organizations, will be Featured in 2019 Employer Toolkit*

BOSTON – Tuesday, December 11, 2018 – Today, the [Massachusetts Employer Health Coalition \(MEHC\)](#), an employer-led effort to address the high and rising cost of health care in the Commonwealth, hosted a packed room at the UMass Club in Boston for an [engaging employer forum](#) focused on improving the appropriate use of emergency departments (ED) as a strategic step toward a more affordable health care system. During the forum, the Massachusetts Health Policy Commission (HPC) released an updated analysis of ED utilization in Massachusetts, including a look into geographic variation as well as the impact of access to alternative care sites such as urgent care centers. Additionally, the MEHC announced the launch of a series of regional listening sessions, beginning early 2019.

The HPC's updated [analysis](#) on ED utilization in Massachusetts showed that the Commonwealth continues to have a higher rate of ED utilization than the United States. Of the approximately 2.4 million ED discharges in the Commonwealth, nearly 1 million are potentially avoidable visits. The HPC also reported that one-in-three Massachusetts residents with employer-sponsored health insurance reported that their last visit to the ED was for a non-emergency condition. The cost of an ED visit in Massachusetts can be 5-6 times more expensive than other settings such as an urgent care center or primary care provider's office.

“The rising cost of providing health insurance to employees remains the most pressing issue facing the 4,000 employers who are members of Associated Industries of Massachusetts,” said Richard C. Lord, President and Chief Executive Officer of AIM and co-chair of the MEHC. “The new Massachusetts Employer Health Coalition is a great example of employers stepping up and taking action to ensure that their workers can access the right care in the right place – at the right price, maximizing both health care quality and affordability.”

The event featured a presentation from Louise Probst, RN, MBA, Executive Director of the Midwest Health Initiative and St. Louis Area Business Health Coalition, a successful employer coalition supporting more than 60 leading self-insured employers. Ms. Probst [highlighted](#) the successful tactics in the Midwest initiative, including encouraging local employers to raise copays for ED visits, emphasizing the importance of building relationships with primary care doctors, and empowering employees with important information to help make smart and efficient decisions regarding their care. The MHI has seen positive early results, including a 5% decrease in ED utilization in 2017, while urgent care center utilization has increased significantly over the same period.

A reaction panel featuring Massachusetts business and healthcare leaders reflected on the presentations from Probst and the HPC, and discussed strategies for the Coalition to consider adopting. The panel included: Mr. Bill Grant, Chief Financial Officer, Cummings Properties; Ms. Lisa Collentro, Chief Administrative Officer, Chestnut Hill Realty; Dr. Steven Strongwater, President and CEO, Atrius Health; and Dr. Thomas Hawkins, Senior Medical Director for Population Health and Analytics, BlueCross BlueShield of Massachusetts.

Highlights from the reaction panel:

- Providers may be most successful in reducing ED use when responsible for total medical expense or otherwise have strong financial incentives to do so.
- As a first step, employers could gain a better understanding of their own data and how it fits into local and national trends, and their own spending.
- Benefit design matters: Value-based insurance design could be a powerful tool to align incentives for providers, payers and patients.
- Communications with employees about where and when to seek care must be ongoing, direct, and intensive.

“I am a firm believer that people will make rational choices if given full information about their options,” said Eileen McAnney, President of the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation and co-chair of the MEHC. “If we connect the dots for patients as to why choosing an emergency department may not make sense for them in some instances, both personally and for the system at large, and we inform them about lower cost, effective alternatives, I’m confident that will change their behavior and take unnecessary cost out of the system.”

During the forum, the MEHC released an [initial round of resources](#) for employers to deploy within their organization. The resources will be included in a toolkit, which will be published in 2019. The Coalition also announced the formation of strategic workgroups that will help inform the work of MEHC, as well as a series of listening sessions across the Commonwealth. The working groups include an Advisory Council, with subgroups on Data and Measurement and Communications.

“Reducing avoidable ED use remains an important target area for health care improvement, and the HPC has recommended coordinated action to address it,” said David Seltz, HPC Executive Director. “We are proud to support the business coalition with the data and transparency they need to tackle this issue with their employees. The Coalition’s goal is the same as the HPC’s – reducing health care cost growth without compromising quality or access.”

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Founded in 2018, the Massachusetts Employer Health Coalition (MEHC) is an employer-led effort to uncover solutions that drive real change in the health care delivery system and reduce costs. The first initiative is a campaign to improve the appropriateness of emergency department (ED) utilization. MEHC aims to reduce potentially avoidable ED use by 20% over two years, resulting in estimated savings of as much as \$100 million.

MEHC is co-chaired by Rick Lord, President and CEO, Associated Industries of Massachusetts (AIM), and Eileen McAnney, President, Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation (MTF). The Coalition includes 21 business organizations representing thousands of large and small employers across the Commonwealth. MEHC is supported by its strategic partners the Massachusetts Health Policy Commission, the Massachusetts Health and Hospital Association, the Massachusetts College of Emergency Physicians, the Massachusetts Association of Health Plans, and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts.

For more information, please contact info@maemployerhealthcoalition.com or visit www.maemployerhealthcoalition.com.