

Advocate Looking For Urgency Around Health Equity



Michael Curry, president of the League of Community Health Centers, speaks Wednesday at a State House briefing about wide-ranging legislation aimed at closing disparities in health care.

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Chris Lisinski

With the crisis at Steward Health Care still unresolved and myriad other thorny policymaking decisions swirling, a top community health leader urged the Legislature not to let "distractions" stymie the push for major health care reforms.

Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers President Michael Curry called on lawmakers to display the "same sense of urgency that we had during COVID," arguing that residents in communities of color continue to suffer as a result of health care disparities.

"We for some reason had urgency in the pandemic that we've lost since the pandemic when, in fact, those same communities are dying, but it's not COVID," Curry told attendees at a Wednesday legislative briefing. "It's diabetes, it's heart disease. It's a whole list of things."

"Saving lives is just as important today as it was three years ago," he added. "I know we have a budget downturn, a fiscal crisis, we've got all kinds of distractions with potential losses of hospitals, but we do great things in difficult circumstances. That's what we do in Massachusetts -- we take that difficult circumstance. We did it through COVID, and despite COVID, we set a higher bar for health equity."

Curry and a wide-ranging coalition of health care and civil rights leaders want the Legislature to embrace a sweeping health equity bill (H 1250 / S 799), which would increase funding to safety-net hospitals and community providers, expand MassHealth coverage to eligible undocumented children and young adults, reduce or eliminate drug costs that treat some chronic illnesses, create new data-monitoring requirements, and stand up an Executive Office of Equity in state government.

The Health Care Financing Committee [heard testimony on the bill in September](#). Lawmakers on the panel have yet to take action on the proposal.

Sen. Pavel Payano, one of the bill's chief sponsors, said Lawrence General Hospital in his hometown continues to face significant budget pressures compared to peer facilities in higher-income areas.

"Lawrence General Hospital only receives 77 percent of the state's average commercial reimbursement, which further contributes to their financial shortfalls," Payano, a Lawrence Democrat, said. "The way our system currently operates simply does not cut it. The standard of care offered to our communities is completely unacceptable."