

# WORCESTER **Business**Journal

## The Health Foundation grants \$250K to support Nashoba Valley following hospital closure

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Photo | Courtesy of State House News Service Nashoba Valley Medical Center in Ayer closed on Aug. 31.

By Alison Kuznitz | State House News Service

As the Nashoba Valley Region continues to grapple with the loss of a hospital, a local group received a three-year, \$250,000 grant to bolster health equity in Ayer, the Healey administration announced Wednesday.

The Health Equity Partnership of North Central Massachusetts will use the funding to create a coalition to address the underlying causes of health disparities in Ayer, including access to care and "social drivers of health," the administration said. The grant is from The Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts.

Gov. Maura Healey broadly referenced the new partnership, which is part of her administration's Advancing Health Equity in Massachusetts (AHEM) initiative, at the Health Equity Trends Summit Wednesday.

"This is a natural extension of the work we've been doing in this region to ensure that health care access is preserved, and also affords us the opportunity to dive even further into the needs of these communities and create specific ways to address the social drivers of cardiometabolic, maternal, and perinatal health," Health and Human Services Secretary Kate Walsh said in a statement.

Nashoba Valley Medical Center in Ayer closed last August as part of the Steward Health Care bankruptcy crisis, alongside Carney Hospital in Dorchester.

UMass Memorial Health is exploring opening a standalone emergency department near the shuttered hospital. But for now, residents are concerned about the loss of nearby emergency care. An advisory panel that Healey launched recommended that officials take a tiered approach to restore essential services to the region "as soon as possible," including an emergency department and cardiac lab.

Ayer Town Manager Robert Pontbriand said the grant and coalition is an "important first step to understanding and solving the barriers and obstacles to health care across the region."