

Health equity remains at the core of all the foundation's work. It also remains at the root of the most pressing community issues. These include rising costs of housing and other basic needs; rising homelessness and strain on the emergency housing systems; long waits for behavioral health services especially for providers who speak multiple languages; and inequities in rates of illness and disease.

The foundation is committed to continuing to work with a wide range of community partners to create more equitable systems in the MetroWest region.

This progress report details the health equity work of the foundation from January 1, 2023, through December 31, 2023. More information on current work and publications can be found at <https://mwhealth.org/strategic-investments/health-equity>.

### GRANTMAKING

The foundation awarded grants in the spring and fall of 2023 through competitive grant rounds directly impacting equity. These included improving health equity, health and housing stability, girls' mental health, organizational capacity building, and community engagement grants.

#### Select Grants Awarded

- ***Advocates***: Hire two behavioral health clinicians from Puerto Rico to serve Spanish speaking clients.
- ***Amazing Things Arts Center (fiscal sponsor for Voices of the Community)***: Community organizing and engagement in South Framingham.
- ***EMK Community Health Center***: Build internal capacity for MassHealth outreach and enrollment services in anticipation of the MassHealth Redetermination process.
- ***Family Promise***: Support and financial assistance to housing insecure families to prevent homelessness.
- ***Health Care for All***: Community outreach and education to increase vaccination rates and assist with MassHealth Redetermination applications in Framingham.
- ***Jewish Family Service of MetroWest***: Assist new immigrant population in accessing healthcare.
- ***Medway Village Food Pantry***: Increase access to culturally appropriate foods to meet needs of changing population using their services.
- ***MetroWest Legal Services***: Legal representation and case management for low-income, elderly and disabled tenants in danger of losing their housing.
- ***MetroWest Worker Center***: Outreach and assistance to immigrant population to facilitate continuation of health insurance through the MassHealth redetermination process.
- ***OUT MetroWest***: Therapist to provide counseling to LBGTQ+ youth in their programs.
- ***Project Just Because***: Spanish and Portuguese speaking interpreter to serve growing population who need translation services.
- ***South Middlesex Opportunity Council***: Provide emergency short-term shelter to families at-risk or experiencing homelessness who are ineligible for existing assistance.

- **SPARK Kindness:** Community-led coalition to understand and prevent identity-based bullying among youth.
- **Wayside Youth and Family Services:** Training for nonprofit and municipal staff on organizational equity.

## CONVENING

The Racial and Ethnic Disparities Workgroup (established in 2005) met monthly throughout the year. Meetings continue to be held virtually based on group preference. There are representatives from a wide range of nonprofit and municipal agencies at each meeting.

The Workgroup serves as a community of practice for professionals to discuss their work related to equity, including best practices and challenges. Group members have also served as advisors to the foundation through sharing insights about how the foundation can be a helpful partner in promoting health equity in the region. Regina Marshall, Chief Operating Officer at Advocates and former foundation Board member is the Chair of the Workgroup.

## TRAINING & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

### *Publications and Data with an Equity Lens:*

- **Community Health Needs Assessment:** Comprehensive quantitative and qualitative data on the health of the region based on community surveys, focus groups, key informant interviews and secondary data. The survey was available in English, Portuguese and Spanish. Responses are available by age, race/ethnicity and language. Focus groups were held with populations likely to be underrepresented in other data sources.
- **Health Data Dashboards:** Data on multiple health metrics and a community dashboard with demographic information on individual towns and cities.
- **MetroWest Adolescent Health Survey:** Survey of all middle and high school youth attending public schools in the region. Administered every two years, it asks youth about a wide range of risk behaviors and health. The survey data is available by gender, language and race/ethnicity. Data reports on disparities among specific populations, like girls and LGBTQ+ youth are also published.
- **Building Inclusive Communities: Health Equity Guidebook:** Updated this year, this publication offers common language and understanding of health equity, highlights regional data and organizational examples and provides links to multiple tools and resources.

### *Workshops:*

- **Wayside Equity Center Training Series:**
  - **Organizational Equity 101:** 12-session series on organizational equity planning and implementation offered to community agencies and municipalities in the region. Monthly workshops were held from September 2022 through May 2023.

- **Intensive Equity Planning Cohort:** In response to an expressed need by those who attended Equity 101 workshops, Guimel DeCarvalho from Wayside led a small cohort of agency leaders through developing and implementing organizational equity plans.
- **Mini-Cohort Equity Training Series:** There are four distinct cohorts on the following topics: Culturally Competent Management; White Accountability Partners Development; LBGTQIA+ Basics and Creating an Affirming Environment, and Advancing Equity in Community. Each cohort meets for three sessions.
- **Groundwater Equity Training:** Two-day session for staff, Board and Committee members on ways historical and current systemic racism creates and perpetuates health and social inequities.
- **Health Leadership Program:** The 6-month program for 10 nonprofit and municipal leaders each year features a half-day session on health equity.

## POLICY & ADVOCACY

**Equity Matters Blog:** The foundation has published multiple issues of *Equity Matters*, a blog focused on relevant issues of health equity in the community. Some were written by foundation staff and others by community partners.

### *Framingham Together*

The foundation is an active participant in Framingham Together, a collective of stakeholders and community partners committed to actively engaging in rooting out the causes of racism at the individual, institutional and systemic levels of organizations and community. The collective meets monthly and is led by Reverend J. Anthony Llyod of the Greater Framingham Community Church. For more information go to [www.framinghamtogether.org](http://www.framinghamtogether.org).

## WORKFORCE

Working with partners to create a pipeline of talented professionals and leaders who are representative of the population of MetroWest has been a longstanding part of the foundation's mission.

### *Scholarship Program*

The program provides scholarships for MetroWest residents pursuing degrees in nursing, social work, psychology, medicine and any other related medical/clinical field. The maximum scholarship amount is \$4,000 per year. Outreach is conducted through multiple channels with the goal of attracting diverse candidates from across the region. The foundation awarded X scholarships this year. Recipients are fluent in at least X languages other than English.

### *Internship Program*

The program provides up to \$7,500 to nonprofit and municipal agencies to directly pay graduate-level interns. Interns must be working in a clinical capacity or to directly improve community health. The

goals are to increase the capacity of agencies; introduce students to MetroWest agencies and municipalities with the hope they will continue to work in the region; and to increase the diversity of interns in the region. The foundation funded 19 interns at 7 agencies this year.

The foundation is interested in feedback from the communities we serve. If you have any ideas, questions or comments, please reach out to Rebecca Gallo, Senior Program Officer at [rgallo@mwhealth.org](mailto:rgallo@mwhealth.org) or 508-879-7625.