

Engaging Community Members in Medicaid Policy and Program Design

No one understands community needs and strengths better than individuals in the community. Engaging with people served by Medicaid helps inform more effective policy and program design, resulting in higher quality, more equitable care. This fact sheet highlights the value of community engagement, describes what it looks like, addresses its connection to health equity, and shares resources to involve community members more effectively in program and policy decision-making.



Why is community engagement critical for program and policy design?

State Medicaid agencies, health plans, providers, and other health care organizations are **increasingly seeking to integrate community member perspectives into program and policy design to improve care delivery**. Meaningful community member engagement can:



Offer organizations valuable insights into member needs



Build trust between health care organizations and communities



Inform policy and program improvements







Advance health equity

What does community member engagement in Medicaid look like?

Community member engagement is the active involvement of individuals, families/caregivers, and community-based organizations (CBOs) in shaping the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs and policies. In Medicaid, this can take many forms with varying levels of involvement — from simply providing members with relevant information to facilitating entirely community-led policy and program decisions.

Following is a continuum of Medicaid member engagement approaches, including examples of strategies:

ENGAGEMENT LEVEL	 INFORM	 INVOLVE	 COLLABORATE	 COMMUNITY-LED
GOAL	Provide members with information to support their understanding of a program, resource, or opportunity.	Understand member concerns and aspirations regarding programs and policy.	Incorporate member insights into the decision-making process , including to identify priorities and preferred solutions.	Place decision-making in the hands of community members to co-create, implement, and evaluate processes and priorities.
EXAMPLES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Print materials Web, video, and social media updates Text message and email campaigns Open houses and informational booths 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member surveys Focus groups Requests for information Public hearings and requests for feedback Ad hoc advisory groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listening sessions Structured advisory groups (e.g., Beneficiary Advisory Councils) with leadership roles for members Hiring former members as project consultants Partnering with CBOs Liaison, ambassador, or navigator programs Co-developed outreach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-developed program policy, priorities, and member engagement Co-facilitated meetings and groups Participatory budgeting and decision-making Hiring current/former members as agency staff and leadership

SOURCE: Adapted from [Strategies for Meaningfully Engaging MassHealth Members to Inform Program and Policy Decisions](#), Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation, June 2024.

Why is community engagement essential to advance health equity?

Community engagement is critical to advance health equity. Engagement strategies can help identify and address health disparities among members across race and ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity, age, disability status, socioeconomic position, primary language, and geography.

Many obstacles to achieving better health and well-being stem from larger structural or systemic health inequities. Community engagement can give community members a more direct say in the design and delivery of care, elevate their priorities, and uncover barriers that might otherwise not be known to health care organizations. Special attention to the strengths — and the needs — of community members with lived experience of discrimination, adversity, and inequity in health care is critical to any meaningful community engagement effort.



How can health care organizations effectively engage communities?



- **Commit time, people, and resources.** Establish a dedicated department or lead for community engagement and focus on attracting staff who reflect the populations served.



- **Provide equitable compensation.** Develop clear, organization-wide guidelines for compensating community members for their time and expertise.



- **Commit to internal culture change.** Foster empathy and understanding across internal staff, including leadership, through training and professional development.



- **Follow through on community feedback.** Don't just solicit input — use it to meaningfully develop or change policy. Communicate openly about what has changed due to community engagement.

What resources exist to help organizations better engage communities?

The Center for Health Care Strategies' [*Community Engagement Resource Center*](#) is designed to help health care organizations adopt and refine meaningful community engagement strategies. It includes case studies, best practices, decision-making tools, checklists, research summaries, and other practical resources.



ABOUT THE CENTER FOR HEALTH CARE STRATEGIES

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