



PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTE
OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS
PARTNERS FOR HEALTH EQUITY

Five-Year Reflection

2017-2021



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DEAR READERS, PARTNERS, COLLEAGUES, FRIENDS:

The Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts (PHIWM) typically publishes reports on particular health issues and not ourselves. However, we often are asked about our regional reach, funding sources, partnership structures, and the scope of our work, so we endeavored to highlight key aspects of the organization as we reflect on the past five years as the PHIWM. Our objectives with this report are to set a baseline for future annual reports that would share organizational impact and lessons learned, and provide glimpses of the important work PHIWM is leading and partnering on to create healthy communities.

Sincerely,

Jessica Collins, Executive Director

Cristina Huebner Torres, Board President



STAFF



From left: Samantha Hamilton, Jessica Collins, Kim Murphy, Tiffany Rufino, Kathleen Szegda, Sandra Alvarado, Kimberly Maende, Victoria Ramos, Amy Khalil, Alisa Ainbinder, Lisa Ranghelli, Sarita Hudson, Liv Anna Homstead (Not pictured: Lynley Rappaport, Gabby Vieyra, Keleigh Waldner)



25 YEARS IN THE MAKING

The Public Health Institute of Western MA was founded in 1996 from the vision of several municipal, healthcare, legislative, and community leaders in the Springfield, MA area. The defunding of public health departments was evident. The vision was to create a neutral entity that could convene competing sectors and organizations to address community health needs through authentic collaboration and with resident input. Hence, Partners for a Healthier Community was born. Over 25 years, we have broadened that vision to include: 1) enhancing our use of regional data, both with numbers and stories; 2) incubation of community-based programs and services; 3) communicating about health strategies and education; and 4) strategic policy advocacy. In 2017, we rebranded to be the Public Health Institute of Western MA, Partners for Health Equity, and we joined the National Network of Public Health Institutes. We thank our community and partners who stand with us to amplify what is wonderful and unique about our region and where we need to pay more attention.

WHAT IS PUBLIC HEALTH?

We often get asked, “What is Public Health?” Public health is about promoting and protecting the health of people and communities in order to prevent illness. Health is largely determined by the social, economic, cultural, and physical environments in which we live. The water you drink, the air you breathe, the products sold in your corner store, the buildings where you and your family spend your time, the treatment of every human being— these all impact your health. PHIWM conducts research and assessments to identify patterns and root causes of poor health. PHIWM also builds coalitions, makes policy recommendations, shares information, and collaboratively innovates and implements solutions.

HEALTH EQUITY

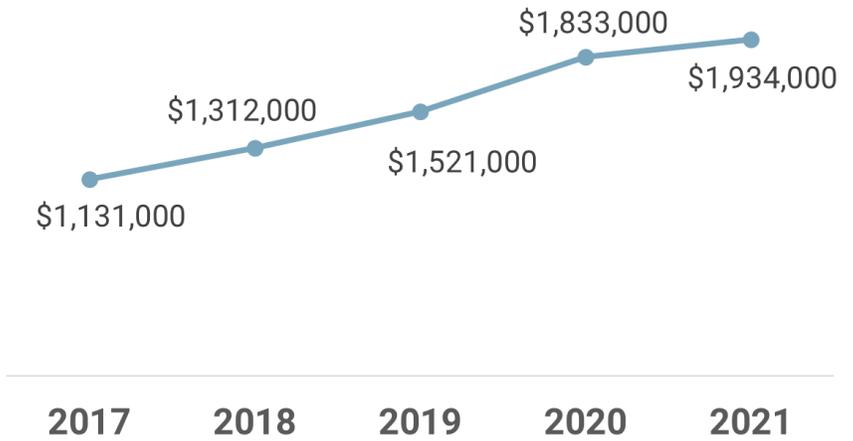
For over two decades, we have been calling out the concept of health (in)equity and the root causes for why some communities suffer more unnecessary and unfair sickness and death than others. We are committed to sharing data and voices that call attention to inequities, as well as identifying the historic racial hierarchy in society that continues to manifest these unjust health differences. We are committed to building capacity with regard to health equity through our community engagement, data reports, coalition building, and policy advocacy.



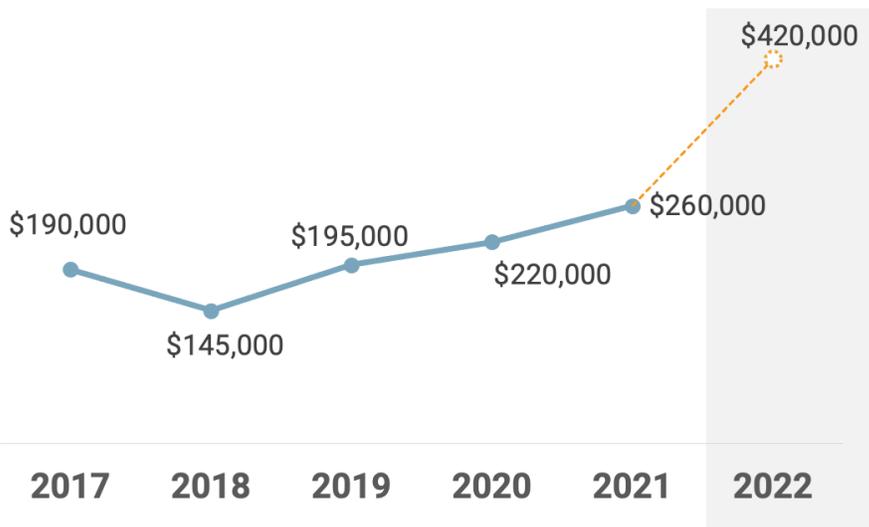
FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

PHIWM receives generous unrestricted funding from Baystate Health and Health New England, and we do not “fundraise” in the traditional manner. In 2014, it was clear that non-profit organizations had to find ways to diversify revenue. Grants from government and philanthropy were becoming more competitive. We conducted an assessment and identified a need in our region for data and evaluation expertise. We are proud to say that by working with many of you, we were able to achieve both goals—diversification of revenue and developing a strategic research and evaluation competency that supports many organizations, government, philanthropy, healthcare, and other sectors in the four counties. Our collaborative efforts have flourished, and we continue to increase the amount of shared resources with other organizations, consultants, and residents who bring expertise and lived experience in ways that complement our staff.

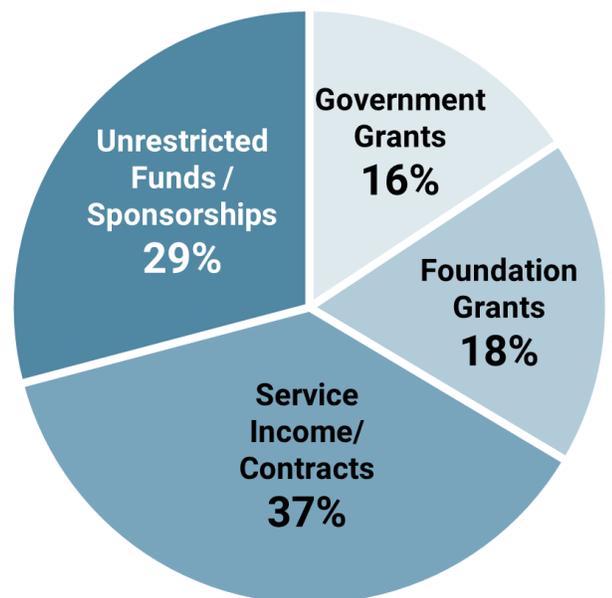
ANNUAL REVENUE



COLLABORATIVE GRANT FUNDS SHARED THROUGH SUBCONTRACTS & STIPENDS

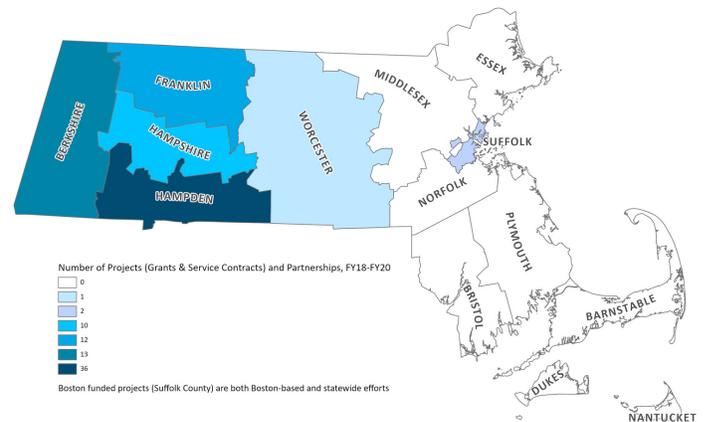


FY21 DIVERSIFICATION OF REVENUE



COALITION BUILDING & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In 2017, we expanded our geographic focus to the four Western MA counties. We are excited to continue building relationships to advance our unique region. We require all staff to go through Facilitative Leadership training to ensure authentic collaboration skills. Our community engagement commitment continues to evolve as we learn from successes and mistakes. In our assessments, research, and coalition work, we identify health improvement strategies and create solutions together with the people our work is trying to impact. We strive to build the capacity of and co-lead with residents most directly impacted by health inequities.



"The Public Health Institute of Western MA has been a key partner of mine for many years. From working together at Neighbor to Neighbor addressing asthma, to providing valuable data and policy information relevant to the Hampden District, and joining together to identify the best ways to address poor health outcomes that are unfair and unjust. As a State Senator, PHIWM is a go-to organization for my team to partner with when we need reliable and authentic information."

State Senator Adam Gomez, Springfield MA

DEEPENING OUR RESIDENT PARTICIPATION

To institutionalize resident participation, [Live Well Springfield](#) developed a Resident Advisory Council (RAC). The RAC structure helps reduce barriers to participation in the planning and design of community-based initiatives, and having residents at the table helps ensure that the work reflects the community and the people it is meant to serve, while simultaneously strengthening community buy-in. An example of this effort is the RAC work on Climate Justice where residents are key partners in determining how to present the policy ideas, where and how to promote and inform other residents, and how to use language or terminology that would resonate with the community. Residents are becoming the face and voice for policy issues.

We are grateful to the members of our RAC who have deepened our equity knowledge by working with us to prioritize coalition strategies, advocate, and increase outreach to others in the community.

Emma Woods is a retired school teacher who is part of the LWS Climate Justice Initiative. She wanted to understand why her granddaughter had asthma in her late thirties and why her husband had COPD though he was not a smoker. She shared, "I want to understand why this was happening, and I wanted to stay involved for the long haul." When residents can lead with their "WHY" of getting involved in climate issues, they invest more in the process and the outcome of making change.

Resident Advisor

FROM INCUBATION TO SUSTAINABILITY

BUILDING THE FOUNDATION FOR A HEALTHY HOMES PROGRAM

For over twelve years, the [Pioneer Valley Asthma Coalition](#) has been leading collaborative efforts to address the housing conditions that can cause or exacerbate asthma. In 2017, PVAC partnered with Revitalize CDC to work on a healthy homes model to address one of the root causes of asthma – unhealthy housing. This collaboration, now led by RevitalizeCDC and called Doorway to an Accessible, Healthy Home (DASHH), won the 2021 Healthcare Heroes Award for healthcare collaborations.

This work was developed with technical assistance and funding from the Green & Healthy Homes Initiative. A number of healthcare organizations including Baystate Health Pulmonary Rehabilitation Department, Baystate Health’s Institute for Healthcare Delivery and Population Science, the Be Healthy Partnership ACO, and Holyoke Medical Center have partnered on this project, as well as the City of Springfield through the Springfield Healthy Homes Collaborative. We will continue to provide data management for Revitalize CDC as they take on program management.

"When we began working with PHIWM, it created an opportunity for us to augment our work to bridge to healthcare and truly change the quality of life for folks in our region."

*Colleen Loveless,
President of Revitalize CDC*



GROWING THE GO FRESH MOBILE MARKET

Food insecurity and hunger are staggering problems in our region. Working with the community, we created a strategy to ease the lack of access to fresh produce for many families– the Go Fresh Mobile Market. Go Fresh began as a food justice project of Live Well Springfield. Over its history, it has successfully increased access to fresh fruits and vegetables to low-income people by making it easy for



Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients to receive the Healthy Incentive program benefits, and by offering vouchers for other customers in order to make it affordable. Go Fresh also increased purchases from regional farmers. After ten years of leading the Go Fresh Mobile Market with an Advisory Board and a number of operators, this year we turned over the leadership to Wellspring Community Harvest. Wellspring has since obtained a three-year grant for Go Fresh from Health New England and is piloting a winter market for the first time, which would mean year-round operations in the future.



CAPACITY BUILDING



ADVANCING RACIAL JUSTICE

In 2014, our Board of Directors launched a new set of strategic goals, including Advancing Racial Justice. Under the Race and Health Equity Board Committee, we developed a matrix to monitor and ensure that our staff and board are reflective of the region and include populations that experience health inequities. We require all staff and board members to take a two-day anti-racism training. We use [Tema Okun's White Dominant Culture Framework](#) to assess our organizational culture and practices to ensure that we are not perpetuating white supremacy. We also have a partnership with the Women of Color Health Equity Collective and the MA Department of Public Health to build a coalition that will create a model for capacity building for racial equity.

EVALUATION TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

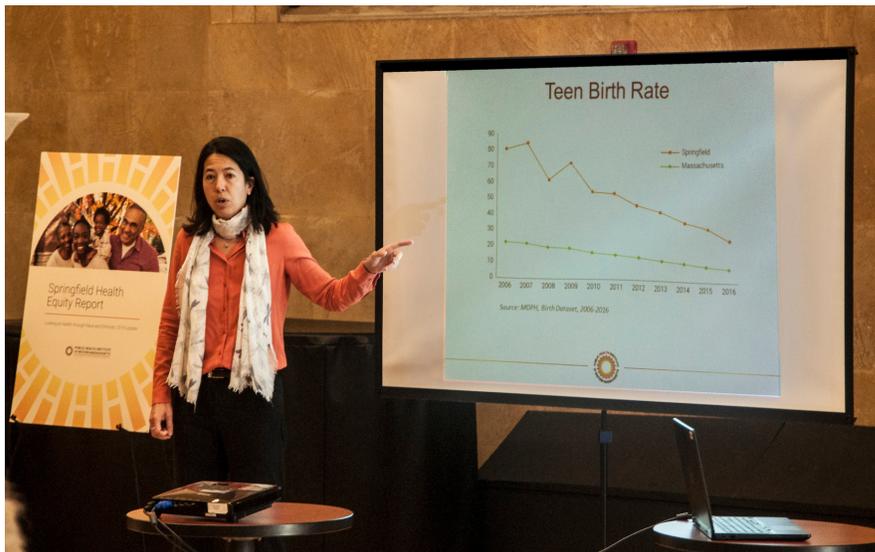
Health New England and Baystate Health contracted with us to provide evaluation technical assistance to their grantees. The MA Department of Public Health also contracts with us to provide regional TA on their COVID-19 Community Impact Survey data. We are grateful for the opportunities to work with so many regional and state partners to show outcomes and impact!

"In recent years, Baystate Health has embraced a broader role in advancing public health in the communities of Western Massachusetts. This is reflected in the 230,000 individuals now managed by the system under globally budgeted population health arrangements, as well as Baystate Health's focus on health equity in its research, educational, and community benefits activities. The Public Health Institute of Western Mass has provided a critical lens to understand how addressing public health issues helps fulfill Baystate Health's Mission. The Institute also has been a catalyst to bring many programs to life that have directly impacted the health and well-being of many in our most challenged communities."

Dr. Mark Keroack, President & CEO, Baystate Health

DATA TO ACTION

We provide local, contextual data that illuminate health inequities, particularly through a race/ ethnicity lens, to highlight the need for more investment and resources to support better health outcomes and quality of life. We have produced [regional and municipal reports](#) together with various advisory groups. Our intention is that they will not sit on shelves, but rather lead to action. We have been able to document when our reports have led to changes in policies, practices, or more resources being shared in our region.



YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Along with many community partners, we launched a new coalition in 2021 to address youth mental health, by lifting up what is working well and providing more resources to needed strategies. This public health priority came from youth health survey findings, a community assessment, and requests from organizations to convene siloed entities. This coalition, in collaboration with Martin Luther King Jr. Family Services' Beat the Odds youth group, is designing and implementing successful protective strategies such as peer mentoring, youth group networking, education and training, and a communications campaign to normalize and destigmatize mental health issues.

“As a result of the Youth Health Survey Mental Health Brief and community collaboration through Project ACCCES, recognizing the need for immediate action, Springfield Public Schools has provided extensive and ongoing professional development to administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, and other staff around inclusive practices to support LGBTQ students. The professional development sessions focused on supporting students' mental health, creating inclusive school communities, and tools and strategies for educators to develop student identity building. Aside from the survey results, Springfield Public Schools has subsequently included additional secondary texts to support student diversity and inclusion, and formally adopted a social-emotional curriculum for all elementary students.”

Michelle Balch, Senior Administrator of Performance and Evaluation, Springfield Public Schools

PIVOTING FOR THE PANDEMIC

At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw a need for accessible, reliable, and centralized public health information, so we took a leap of faith and initiated a communications strategy. It has been met with such incredibly positive feedback that we have expanded over the many months. A network survey showed that 9 out of 10 respondents trust the information we share either “a lot” or “a great deal”. Nearly all (98%) webinar attendees found the information shared to be relevant and the speakers engaging. We are honored and committed to continuing these efforts as your trusted source of information in the region.

“My family uses [the e-newsletter] as a guide for a weekly family conversation about the virus—how our community is doing, what actions we as responsible individuals need to continue, do we need to adjust any of our new habits, and how is our family coping emotionally. We understood early on that the pandemic would be a marathon and that we needed to adjust to reality for the long haul. Your emails give us the guidepost to continue to deal with what is real. Thank you, again, for all you are doing.”

Resident

“The Public Health Institute of Western MA has grown into a critically important public health entity in our Commonwealth -- and a strong collaborator with us at the Department of Public Health. We value the way PHIWM pairs our DPH data with community engagement from local partners to inform and lift up western MA assets and needs. Their leadership in the region is transformative.”

*Lindsey Tucker, Associate Commissioner;
Massachusetts Department of Public Health*

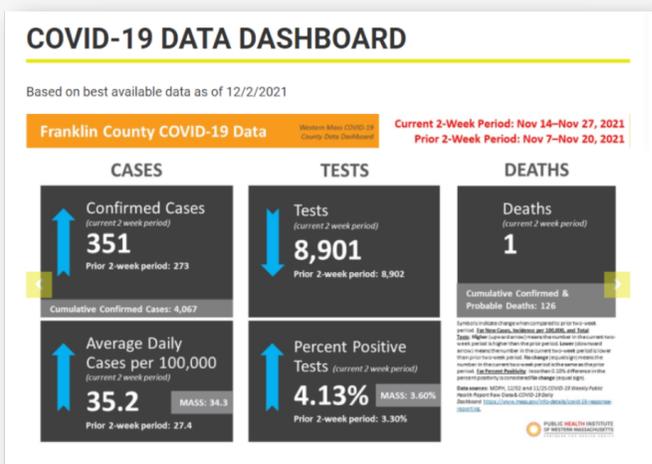
ANSWERING THE CALL FOR REGIONAL COVID-19 DATA

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, we heard from policymakers in our region looking to understand the specific needs of Western MA. We launched our [Western MA COVID-19 County Data Dashboard](#) in August 2020. We now feature county data over time, community-level data, vaccine data, county-specific pages, links to other important data sources, and more. Our Dashboard is filling a need by providing accessible, accurate, relevant, and timely data that can be used to help inform decision-making across the region. Our Dashboard, supported by a regional Data Advisory Group and referenced by news outlets and on various web pages, is being used by government and public health officials.

“The Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts’ data gives us data we were not able to get from the state dashboard.” – School Nurse Leader

“I’ve posted on Twitter and Facebook. And will continue to reference it. Also, I’ll be forwarding to colleagues.” – State Representative

“I appreciate seeing data that is current, relevant and clearly presented.” – Resident



EXPANDING ACCESS TO RESOURCES

In 2018, we joined organizations in our region to create an online community resource database, [413Cares.org](https://www.413cares.org), to better connect social services, residents, and healthcare. 413Cares continues to expand access to community resources for the region with over 35,000 searches and 9,000 users since 2020. Our work to encourage community organizations to update their listings has resulted in 430 programs being updated, which ensures accurate, timely information about local resources.



LOOKING FORWARD

STRENGTHENING OUR POLICY MUSCLE

In 2022, we are enhancing our Data to Policy Action organizational resources. We will prioritize policies from current coalitions and assessment reports to ensure change to support equity in our region. Currently, we are working with many partners to lift up policy action with regard to climate justice and air quality; healthy housing strategies (focused on lead poisoning and asthma), and recommendations from our recent Health Impact Assessment on housing and CORIs. We anticipate additional policy action to bolster the mental and behavioral health infrastructure in Western MA.

"You all did a great job. The HIA exceeded my expectations, and I am looking forward to advocating both for individuals who are disadvantaged by their criminal history and for better policies and protections for these individuals."

*HIA Advisory Committee Member
Healthy Aging & The Use of CORIs in
Housing Decisions*

"We have really enjoyed working more closely with PHIWM over the past few years on coalition building and data services. We also partner on regional policy action and look forward to deepening our collaborations with PHIWM in the Berkshires."

*Laura Kittross
Director, Berkshire Public Health Alliance,
Berkshire Regional Planning Commission*

"PHIWM is a vital organization in our region. The work that they do lifts up the alarming health inequities experienced by our regional residents, whether rural, suburban or urban. But, PHIWM also offers solutions by working together with all of us to make sure all have access to what they need to be healthy."

Josh Garcia, Mayor of Holyoke

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A historic legacy of social, economic, and environmental inequities, such as racism and gender-based discrimination, are embedded in societal institutions and result in poor health. These unjust inequities affect communities differently with some bearing a greater burden of poorer health. These inequities can influence health more than individual choices or access to healthcare. PHIWM recognizes its responsibility to dismantle these injustices by promoting health through policies, practices, and organizational systems that benefit all. We encourage others to join in these efforts.



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