

## THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

LEGAL UPDATES

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# Massachusetts Department of Public Health Announces New Initiative to Advance Racial Equity

At the March 13, 2024 Public Health Council meeting, the Department of Public Health's inaugural Assistant Commissioner for Health Equity, Dr. Hafsatou Diop, MD, MPH, presented DPH's Strategic Plan to Advance Racial Equity. Declaring racism an urgent public health threat, Dr. Diop re-iterated DPH's commitment to "narrow the disparities in health caused by systemic racism". The strategic plan is the result of the collaboration of 110 individuals both within and outside of DPH with expertise in racial-equity-centered public health. In order to recognize, dismantle and meaningfully address existing racial and health inequities that exist in the Commonwealth's public health system, the strategic plan sets forth four key actions:

1. Leading emergency preparedness and response;
2. Strengthening the public health workforce;
3. Modernizing public health infrastructure; and
4. Enhancing public service.

In addition to the four strategies identified, DPH laid out four commitments to lead how it carries out its strategic plan:

1. Partnering with communities to provide and interpret data
2. Examining the root causes of inequities
3. Co-creating solutions intended to transform the root causes that perpetuate inequities in public health

4. Creating structures and policies that advance health equity by focusing on the social determinants

### **What this means to you**

While much of the plan focuses on the actions DPH will take internally, we can expect a number of changes will be made impacting healthcare providers. For example, current Determination of Need regulations require applicants to submit the demographic and payer data of its patient panel in a format chosen by the applicant. Similarly, applicants must demonstrate how the proposed project will impact health equity. Under this plan, we might see DPH take action to enforce more prescriptive data reporting elements with a closer look at health disparities and the actions each provider is taking to address them.

Over a series of communications, we'll explore each of DPH's strategies under this plan and what we might expect to see over the coming months and years.

### **Contact us**

If you have questions about the new DPH initiative and how it affects your organization or job function, please contact Crystal Bloom, Kasey Ciolfi, or your Husch Blackwell attorney.