



Health and Human Services

The Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) maintains and promotes the health, independence, and resilience of almost one out of every three Massachusetts residents.

House 2 provides \$9.76 billion for EOHHS, excluding MassHealth, a \$780.7 million, or a 9 percent increase above the Fiscal Year 2024 GAA.

The House 2 budget reflects the Healey–Driscoll Administration’s commitment to equity across all agencies, regions, and, most importantly, the people of Massachusetts.

EOHHS is working across its agencies, with the Executive Offices of Education (EOE) and Labor and Workforce and Development (EOLWD), and with partners throughout the state, to mitigate workforce challenges within health and human services.

The House 2 budget proposal is responsive to the state’s fiscal realities while maintaining or expanding support for critical programs and services in the face of increased need, growing caseloads, and record inflation.

In addition, EOHHS has identified five high-value, cross-agency priorities which will improve the health, well-being, and resilience of the people EOHHS serves:

- Supporting youth and adolescents with complex needs
- Investing in economic empowerment and resilience
- Transforming behavioral health
- Preparing for an aging population
- Improving agency front door access

Guided by Governor Healey's pillars of affordability, equity, and competitiveness, these commitments drive EOHHS' work to support, uplift and empower Massachusetts residents.

This budget recommendation contains measures to strengthen the nursing and human services workforces; reduce financial burdens for many vulnerable residents; and support children, families, and older adults across Massachusetts. It creates programs to support adolescents with complex needs; funds innovative solutions for food insecurity across the Commonwealth; establishes equity-focused pipelines to greatly expand the pool of qualified American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters; and makes aging in Massachusetts more affordable through investments in senior home care programs.

Across every line item and new investment, the goal remains the same: to improve accessibility, affordability, health, and equity for Massachusetts residents.

MassHealth

MassHealth, the Commonwealth's Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), provides coverage of health care and related critical services to over 2 million members, including over 40 percent of Massachusetts children and over 60 percent of Massachusetts residents living in nursing facilities. MassHealth maintains affordable, equitable, comprehensive health care coverage for members.

In Fiscal Year 2025, MassHealth will continue to ensure access to high-quality services while managing the loss of ~\$1 billion of annual federal revenue during the pandemic and significant health care cost growth over the past two years. House 2 recommends \$20.3 billion gross/\$8.2 billion net for MassHealth, an increase of \$730 million gross/\$440 million net above estimated Fiscal Year 2024 spending. These growth figures assume the implementation of substantial savings initiatives, including enhanced program integrity efforts, additional federal revenue streams, and targeted reductions in spending.

Despite these fiscal headwinds, the budget proposal proposes investments that advance MassHealth's priorities, which are: (1) advancing health equity, (2) simplifying member experience and improving customer service, (3) strengthening behavioral health and primary care, and (4) promoting member independence. Highlighted investments include:

- Supporting complex members in the community with ~\$70 million in targeted rate investments that address workforce challenges across community-based nursing and direct care workers. In addition, MassHealth will invest \$5 million annually to improve access to wheelchair repair services.
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- Sustaining and building on recent investments in behavioral health, primary care, and maternity care, with an additional ~\$60 million in rate investments across these critical services.
- \$10 million of infrastructure funding for correctional partners in advance of implementing MassHealth coverage 90 days before release from jail or prison settings.

Investing in Our Future by Supporting Children, Youth and Families and Vulnerable Populations

The Healey-Driscoll Administration's commitment to our future is reflected in the Fiscal Year 2025 investments that provide health and nutrition support for families, keep children safe from abuse and neglect, and steer at-risk youth toward a more successful path.

This budget recommendation would fund the Department of Children and Families (DCF) at \$1.53 billion, a \$163.5 million (12 percent) increase, to support the well-being of children and to assist families in overcoming challenges. It includes investments with an emphasis on equity, and upstream prevention to stabilize and strengthen families while preventing out-of-home placements wherever possible.

House 2 maintains the Legislature's significant investments in the department from Fiscal Year 2024 and introduces new financial supports for children involved with DCF, staff, and foster parents. Highlights include:

- An investment of \$6.1 million to address projected growth in caseloads across substitute care (foster care, intensive foster care, and congregate care), permanency placements (adoption and guardianship subsidies), and support and stabilization efforts.
- An investment of \$3.4 million to raise foster care rates by 3.7 percent. Foster parents are one of the most valuable resources in serving DCF's mission. The higher foster care rate will better reimburse for the day-to-day costs incurred by foster families who care for children in their homes. It will also help support the recruitment and retention of foster parents and kinship families.
- Supports the establishment of accounts that allow social security benefits to go directly to children leaving foster care when they transition to adulthood to pay for college, housing, and other expenses.

There is a gap in current programming to treat or manage adolescent youth with complex needs who are in emergency departments (EDs) or inpatient units because they cannot safely receive appropriate treatment in existing congregate programs. This budget invests \$10 million in the development of intensive residential program models to support these high-need youth, as well as pilot strategies for securing workforce for these intensive residential models.

To further support at-risk Massachusetts youth, House 2 recommends a critical expansion of the Massachusetts Youth Diversion Program (MYDP), an evidence-based program that diverts youth from formal juvenile justice processing and toward community-based alternatives. Currently, the program is located in seven counties across Massachusetts. The House 2 budget includes \$2.1 million to support increased demand in established programs and to expand to three additional counties. This is part of the \$191.9 million allocation for the

Department of Youth Services (DYS) in House 2, a \$8.8 million or 5 percent increase over Fiscal Year 2024.

As part of the Administration's ongoing commitment to supporting survivors of sexual and domestic violence, House 2 recommends more than \$150 million across three secretariats for Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence services, a \$5 million (3 percent) increase over Fiscal Year 2024.

Additionally, this budget maintains the Fiscal Year 2024 expansion of funding for Office for Refugees and Immigrants (ORI) administrative capacity, which has significantly expanded services over the past year to meet the cultural and linguistic needs of refugees and immigrants in Massachusetts.

Investing in Economic Empowerment and Resilience

To reduce the financial burden on some of Massachusetts' most vulnerable residents, House 2 recommends funding the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) at \$1.16 billion, representing a \$88.9 million, or 8 percent, increase. DTA stabilizes one in six residents of the Commonwealth with direct economic assistance (cash benefits) and food assistance (SNAP benefits), as well as workforce training opportunities. This funding is critical, especially for families with children and elders in our state. The proposed budget investments allow DCF to support families living in intergenerational households and reflect anticipated increases in caseload.

To combat food insecurity among Massachusetts residents, this budget recommends \$25.1 million in funding for the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP), which rewards healthy food purchases via the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) from local vendors and supports our family farmers as well. House 2 also introduces a major investment in the Mobile EBT Payment Pilot. This funding would support the development and adoption of more secure payment technologies for SNAP and cash assistance to protect clients' benefits, combat stigma, and reduce fraud and abuse.

Transforming Behavioral Health

The Healey-Driscoll Administration is focused on making sure Massachusetts residents have access to the health care and treatment they need. Behavioral health is a critical component of health and the Fiscal Year 2025 House 2 budget contains targeted new investments in mental health care and substance use prevention and treatment.

Department of Public Health in House 2 is funded at \$967.3 million, including \$200.7 million for the Bureau of Substance Addiction Services. The DPH budget maintains and invests in key programs including the 988 Crisis Lifeline – which offers 24/7 emotional support for individuals experiencing a mental health crisis – and the DPH Suicide Prevention Program, which provides education, training, funding, and support to reduce suicide across Massachusetts.

House 2 also recommends funding the Department of Mental Health at \$1.24 billion, a \$105.4 million (9 percent) increase over Fiscal Year 2024. This proposal fully supports the historic investment in expanding DMH capacity that began in Fiscal Year 2023 and adds \$10.2 million to expand Adult Community Clinical Services (ACCS) placements. This also includes \$64.6

million to support direct care staff and provider workforces by annualizing collective bargaining agreement and provider rate increases and a new \$3.7 million investment to expand emergency room diversion, inpatient capacity, and respite services. Given high rates of emergency department (ED) boarding throughout the state, particularly among youth and adolescents, the emergency room diversion program is an essential part of connecting individuals to clinically appropriate care while reducing the burden on emergency departments.

Massachusetts' ED boarding challenges reflect a nationwide increase in youth behavioral health challenges. The most effective and promising intervention for youth behavioral health is to serve children and youth where they are – in schools. This budget maintains historic investments in and expands DPH's school-based behavioral health program, including developing expertise to work with LGBTQ+ youth. This crucial investment would fund additional behavioral health staffing in educational settings and support efforts to embed behavioral health care into school nursing services and school-based health centers.

In addition to these investments, EOHHS will invest in a redesign of the Children's Behavioral Health Initiative (CBHI), which began 20 years ago and provides intensive services for children with Serious Emotional Disturbance (SED). EOHHS will engage with families, providers, and advocates to refine the program to better respond to children's needs, workforce challenges and the promise of telehealth.

Caring for an Aging Massachusetts Population

Senior homeowners and renters received critical tax relief in the 2023 tax reform legislation. This budget recommendation builds on that major investment in senior housing through the elimination of co-pays for over 10,000 low-income Home Care clients. It also includes investments in the Community Transitional Liaison Program (CTLP) and electronic POLST (end of life) programs, both of which enable older adults and people with disabilities to reside in the most independent location based on their needs and health.

House 2 further ensures the Executive Office of Elder Affairs (EOEA) can continue to provide necessary support for older adults through a \$768.3 million budget, a \$46.3 million, or 6 percent, increase over Fiscal Year 2024. This includes an investment in additional staffing for the Mass Options program, which connects older adults, individuals with disabilities, and their caregivers with the agencies and organizations that can best meet their needs. The Fiscal Year 2024 investment to expand the Council on Aging formula grant is maintained under this budget proposal, ensuring an ongoing rate of \$14 per older adult.

Empowering Individuals with Disabilities

The Healey-Driscoll Administration is committed to ensuring equity and accessibility at every level. This budget includes pivotal investments in accessibility measures for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing community. To address a shortage of ASL interpreters, House 2 creates a training program and pipeline for interpreters to work with the Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH). The program will include specialized legal and high-profile interpreting trainings, while also increasing outreach to critical areas of need such as medical, mental health, and substance use disorder (SUD) interpreting. This equity-based training program will diversify the pool of interpreters and increase outreach in every community.

House 2 also expands the After-Hours Emergency (AHE) Program, which provides after-hours requests for emergency interpreter services. This investment will allow MCDHH to recruit and increase the number of on-call providers for the AHE program to improve providers' ability to fill after-hours requests. The proposal further supports a projected increase in demand for ASL and CART interpreter services.

The Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) is funded at \$28.3 million in the House 2 budget proposal, including a new investment in specialized counselors to work within the blind community. This funding will promote regional equity by closing gaps in access for certain communities throughout the state.

As Governor Healey announced in late 2023, the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission is currently in the process of renaming and rebranding to MassAbility, with the goal of better representing the agency's mission and promoting equity and access for people with disabilities. This measure is currently pending in the Legislature. House 2 supports projected enrollment increases and consumer services utilization, including the MRC Connect service, which streamlines the enrollment process for consumers.

The Department of Developmental Services (DDS) caseload is continuing to rise as its population ages and the needs of the population change. House 2 funds DDS at \$2.92 billion, a \$126.8 million (5 percent) increase over Fiscal Year 2024. This budget fully funds the annualization of last year's Turning 22 class, which is the largest class the department has ever seen. Turning 22 supports individuals with disabilities transition from the education system to the adult service system. In recent years, enrollment has increased due to population growth and growing awareness of services available to support neurodiverse adults.

This budget invests in new home and community-based service programs and assistive technology to help individuals with disabilities navigate their lives with greater autonomy. It also invests in essential human services workforce through annualizing collective bargaining agreements and provider rate increases.

Health and Human Service Workforce Investments

Our safety net is staffed by some of the hardest working and caring professionals in the state, but many of these challenging and rewarding jobs have often gone unfilled, leaving Massachusetts residents without the assistance they need. The Healey-Driscoll Administration is investing in the people who make our health and human service system work, its caregivers, with key funding increases in the House 2 budget proposal.

In response to staffing shortages, the House 2 budget invests in critical nursing workforce development initiatives. The budget proposal funds new certificate programs and recruitment bonuses to expand the nursing educator workforce, while also expanding access to Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) licensing by offering the CNA exam in multiple languages and paying for test costs for first time test takers.

House 2 also supports significant investments in our human services workforce, including annualizing crucial Fiscal Year 2024 Chapter 257 human service provider rate investments.

