

# 2019 Pre-Filed Testimony

## HOSPITALS AND PROVIDER ORGANIZATIONS



**As part of the  
*Annual Health Care  
Cost Trends Hearing***

## Notice of Public Hearing

Pursuant to M.G.L. c. 6D, § 8, the Massachusetts Health Policy Commission (HPC), in collaboration with the Office of the Attorney General (AGO) and the Center for Health Information and Analysis (CHIA), holds an annual public hearing on health care cost trends. The hearing examines health care provider, provider organization, and private and public health care payer costs, prices, and cost trends, with particular attention to factors that contribute to cost growth within the Commonwealth's health care system.

The 2019 hearing dates and location:

**Tuesday, October 22, 2019, 9:00 AM**  
**Wednesday, October 23, 2019, 9:00 AM**  
**Suffolk University Law School**  
**First Floor Function Room**  
**120 Tremont Street, Boston, MA 02108**

The HPC will call for oral testimony from witnesses, including health care executives, industry leaders, and government officials. Time-permitting, the HPC will accept oral testimony from members of the public beginning at approximately 3:30 PM on Tuesday, October 22. Any person who wishes to testify may sign up on a first-come, first-served basis when the hearing commences on October 22.

The HPC also accepts written testimony. Written comments will be accepted until October 25, 2019, and should be submitted electronically to [HPC-Testimony@mass.gov](mailto:HPC-Testimony@mass.gov), or, if comments cannot be submitted electronically, sent by mail, post-marked no later than October 25, 2019, to the Massachusetts Health Policy Commission, 50 Milk Street, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor, Boston, MA 02109, attention Lois H. Johnson, General Counsel.

Please note that all written and oral testimony provided by witnesses or the public may be posted on the HPC's website: [www.mass.gov/hpc](http://www.mass.gov/hpc).

The HPC encourages all interested parties to attend the hearing. For driving and public transportation directions, please visit the [Suffolk University website](#). Suffolk University Law School is located diagonally across from the Park Street MBTA station (Red and Green lines). Parking is not available at Suffolk, but information about nearby garages is listed at the link provided. The event will also be available via livestream and video will be available on the [HPC's YouTube Channel](#) following the hearing.

If you require disability-related accommodations for this hearing, please contact HPC staff at (617) 979-1400 or by email at [HPC-Info@mass.gov](mailto:HPC-Info@mass.gov) a minimum of two weeks prior to the hearing so that we can accommodate your request.

For more information, including details about the agenda, expert and market participant witnesses, testimony, and presentations, please check the [Annual Cost Trends Hearing page](#) on the HPC's website. Materials will be posted regularly as the hearing dates approach.

## Instructions for Written Testimony

If you are receiving this, you are hereby required under M.G.L. c. 6D, § 8 to submit written pre-filed testimony for the 2019 Annual Cost Trends Hearing.

You are receiving two sets of questions – one from the HPC, and one from the AGO. We encourage you to refer to and build upon your organization’s 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, and/or 2018 pre-filed testimony responses, if applicable. Additionally, if there is a point that is relevant to more than one question, please state it only once and make an internal reference. **If a question is not applicable to your organization, please indicate so in your response.**

On or before the close of business on **September 20, 2019**, please electronically submit written testimony to: [HPC-Testimony@mass.gov](mailto:HPC-Testimony@mass.gov). Please complete relevant responses in the provided template. If necessary, you may include additional supporting testimony or documentation in an appendix. Please submit any data tables included in your response in Microsoft Excel or Access format.

The testimony must contain a statement from a signatory that is legally authorized and empowered to represent the named organization for the purposes of this testimony. The statement must note that the testimony is signed under the pains and penalties of perjury. An electronic signature will be sufficient for this submission.

If you have any difficulty with the templates or have any other questions regarding the pre-filed testimony process or the questions, please contact either HPC or AGO staff at the information below.

### **HPC Contact Information**

For any inquiries regarding HPC questions, please contact General Counsel Lois H. Johnson at [HPC-Testimony@mass.gov](mailto:HPC-Testimony@mass.gov) or (617) 979-1405.

### **AGO Contact Information**

For any inquiries regarding AGO questions, please contact Assistant Attorney General Amara Azubuike at [Amara.Azubuike@mass.gov](mailto:Amara.Azubuike@mass.gov) or (617) 963-2021.

## Pre-Filed Testimony Questions: Health Policy Commission

### 1. STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS HEALTH CARE SPENDING GROWTH:

Since 2013, the Massachusetts Health Policy Commission (HPC) has set an annual statewide target for sustainable growth of total health care spending. Between 2013 and 2017, the benchmark rate was set at 3.6%, and, on average, annual growth in Massachusetts has been below that target. For 2018 and 2019, the benchmark was set at a lower target of 3.1%. Continued success in meeting the reduced growth rate will require enhanced efforts by all actors in the health care system, supported by necessary policy reforms, to achieve savings without compromising quality or access.

- a. What are your organization's top strategic priorities to reduce health care expenditures? What specific initiatives or activities is your organization undertaking to address each of these priorities and how have you been successful?

**Holyoke Medical Center has been and continues to be on the lower end of the cost spectrum in the Commonwealth. We have achieved this by sound management, good stewardship of resources, innovation in care delivery design (including but not limited to a robust care navigation department). In addition, Holyoke Medical Center is an active participant in the MassHealth ACO project, investing time and resources to fine-tune care management processes that reduce the total cost of care. As a low cost safety net hospital provider we feel we are already impacting the cost curve positively by offsetting drug cost increases and care at higher cost facilities by continuing to provide lower cost care close to home.**

- b. What changes in policy, market behavior, payment, regulation, or statute would most support your efforts to reduce health care expenditures?

**Better overall reimbursement for Holyoke Medical Center would allow us to focus more resources in improving our outreach, primary care and behavioral health footprint, and create better access to our services. Unfortunately the market has no incentive to invest in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas such as Holyoke, so we continue to advocate for policy and regulations to ensure that resources are directed to the providers, such as Holyoke Medical Center, that can make a significant difference in managing cost in their communities.**

### 2. STRATEGIES AND POLICIES TO SUPPORT INVESTMENT IN PRIMARY CARE AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CARE:

The U.S. health care system has historically underinvested in areas such as primary care and behavioral health care, even though evidence suggests that a greater orientation toward primary care and behavioral health may increase health system efficiency and provide superior patient access and quality of care. Provider organizations, payers, employers, and government alike have important roles in prioritizing primary care and behavioral health *while still restraining the growth in overall health care spending.*

- a. Please describe your organization's strategy for supporting and increasing investment in primary care, including any specific initiatives or activities your organization is undertaking to execute on this strategy and any evidence that such activities are increasing access, improving quality, or reducing total cost of care.

**Holyoke Medical Center continues to invest, what modest investments a safety net hospital can afford, in primary care clinics in our market area. Specifically Holyoke**

**Medical Center has expanded clinics in Holyoke, Chicopee and Westfield to include broader services, including diagnostics as well as creating availability of walk-in appointments. Based on the utilization of the walk-in appointment schedule, early indications are that access has been greatly improved.**

- b. Please describe your organization’s top strategy for supporting and increasing investment in behavioral health care, including any specific initiatives or activities your organization is undertaking to execute on this strategy and any evidence that such activities are increasing access, improving quality, or reducing total cost of care.

**Our organization, while continuing to provide first rate behavioral health services, has no ability to make additional investments in behavioral health because of the low reimbursement for those services and the overall underfunding of safety net hospitals.**

- c. Payers may also provide incentives or other supports to provider organizations to deliver high-functioning, high-quality, and efficient primary care and to improve behavioral health access and quality. What are the top contract features or payer strategies that are or would be most beneficial to or most effective for your organization in order to strengthen and support primary and behavioral health care?

**The most beneficial change private payers could make is to give Holyoke Medical Center fair payments for services rendered, based on the quality of care delivered and resources used, and not based on the zip code the facility is located in.**

- d. What other changes in policy, market behavior, payment, regulation, or statute would best accelerate efforts to reorient a greater proportion of overall health care resources towards investments in primary care and behavioral health care? Specifically, what are the barriers that your organization perceives in supporting investment in primary care and behavioral health and how would these suggested changes in policy, market behavior, payment, regulation, or statute mitigate these barriers?

**As has been mentioned in prior answers, a facility which is underpaid by private insurers and has a predominantly Medicaid population has very limited ability to make investments. Policies directing private payers to pay safety net hospitals appropriate rates would have the most impact on driving additional investments in primary care and behavioral health.**

3. **CHANGES IN RISK SCORE AND PATIENT ACUITY:**

In recent years, the risk scores of many provider groups’ patient populations, as determined by payer risk adjustment tools, have been steadily increasing and a greater share of services and diagnoses are being coded as higher acuity or as including complications or major complications. Please indicate the extent to which you believe each of the following factors has contributed to increased risk scores and/or increased acuity for your patient population.

Factors	Level of Contribution
Increased prevalence of chronic disease among your patients	Major Contributing Factor
Aging of your patients	Minor Contributing Factor
New or improved EHRs that have increased your ability to document diagnostic information	Not a Significant Factor

Factors	Level of Contribution
Coding integrity initiatives (e.g., hiring consultants or working with payers to assist with capturing diagnostic information)	Not a Significant Factor
New, relatively less healthy patients entering your patient pool	Minor Contributing Factor
Relatively healthier patients leaving your patient pool	Not a Significant Factor
Coding changes (e.g., shifting from ICD-9 to ICD-10)	Not a Significant Factor
Other, please describe: Click here to enter text.	Level of Contribution

Not applicable; neither risk scores nor acuity have increased for my patients in recent years.

#### 4. REDUCING ADMINISTRATIVE COMPLEXITY:

Administrative complexity is endemic in the U.S. health care system. It is associated with negative impacts, both financial and non-financial, and is one of the principal reasons that U.S. health care spending exceeds that of other high-income countries. For each of the areas listed below, please indicate whether achieving greater alignment and simplification is a **high priority**, a **medium priority**, or a **low priority** for your organization. Please indicate **no more than three high priority areas**. If you have already submitted these responses to the HPC via the June 2019 *HPC Advisory Council Survey on Reducing Administrative Complexity*, do not resubmit unless your responses have changed.

Area of Administrative Complexity	Priority Level
<b>Billing and Claims Processing</b> – processing of provider requests for payment and insurer adjudication of claims, including claims submission, status inquiry, and payment	High
<b>Clinical Documentation and Coding</b> – translating information contained in a patient’s medical record into procedure and diagnosis codes for billing or reporting purposes	Medium
<b>Clinician Licensure</b> – seeking and obtaining state determination that an individual meets the criteria to self-identify and practice as a licensed clinician	Medium
<b>Electronic Health Record Interoperability</b> – connecting and sharing patient health information from electronic health record systems within and across organizations	Medium
<b>Eligibility/Benefit Verification and Coordination of Benefits</b> – determining whether a patient is eligible to receive medical services from a certain provider under the patient’s insurance plan(s) and coordination regarding which plan is responsible for primary and secondary payment	High
<b>Prior Authorization</b> – requesting health plan authorization to cover certain prescribed procedures, services, or medications for a plan member	Medium
<b>Provider Credentialing</b> – obtaining, verifying, and assessing the qualifications of a practitioner to provide care or services in or for a health care organization	Low

Area of Administrative Complexity	Priority Level
<b>Provider Directory Management</b> – creating and maintaining tools that help health plan members identify active providers in their network	Low
<b>Quality Measurement and Reporting</b> – evaluating the quality of clinical care provided by an individual, group, or system, including defining and selecting measures specifications, collecting and reporting data, and analyzing results	Medium
<b>Referral Management</b> – processing provider and/or patient requests for medical services (e.g., specialist services) including provider and health plan documentation and communication	Low
<b>Variations in Benefit Design</b> – understanding and navigating differences between insurance products, including covered services, formularies, and provider networks	Medium
<b>Variations in Payer-Provider Contract Terms</b> – understanding and navigating differences in payment methods, spending and efficiency targets, quality measurement, and other terms between different payer-provider contracts	High
<b>Other, please describe:</b> Click here to enter text.	Priority Level
<b>Other, please describe:</b> Click here to enter text.	Priority Level
<b>Other, please describe:</b> Click here to enter text.	Priority Level

5. STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT ADOPTION AND EXPANSION OF ALTERNATIVE PAYMENT METHODS:

For over a decade, Massachusetts has been a leader in promoting and adopting alternative payment methods (APMs) for health care services. However, as noted in HPC’s [2018 Cost Trends Report](#), recently there has been slower than expected growth in the adoption of APMs in commercial insurance products in the state, particularly driven by low rates of global payment usage by national insurers operating in the Commonwealth, low global payment usage in preferred provider organization (PPO) products, and low adoption of APMs other than global payment. Please identify which of the following strategies you believe would most help your organization continue to adopt and expand participation in APMs. **Please select no more than three.**

- Expanding APMs other than global payment predominantly tied to the care of a primary care population, such as bundled payments
- Identifying strategies and/or creating tools to better manage the total cost of care for PPO populations
- Encouraging non-Massachusetts based payers to expand APMs in Massachusetts
- Identifying strategies and/or creating tools for overcoming problems related to small patient volume
- Enhancing data sharing to support APMs (e.g., improving access to timely claims data to support population health management, including data for carve-out vendors)
- Aligning payment models across payers and products
- Enhancing provider technological infrastructure

Other, please describe: [Click here to enter text.](#)



## Pre-Filed Testimony Questions: Attorney General's Office

1. For provider organizations: please submit a summary table showing for each year 2015 to 2018 your total revenue under pay for performance arrangements, risk contracts, and other fee for service arrangements according to the format and parameters reflected in the attached **AGO Provider Exhibit 1**, with all applicable fields completed. To the extent you are unable to provide complete answers for any category of revenue, please explain the reasons why. Include in your response any portion of your physicians for whom you were not able to report a category (or categories) of revenue.
  
2. Chapter 224 requires providers to make price information on admissions, procedures, and services available to patients and prospective patients upon request.
  - a. Please use the following table to provide available information on the number of individuals that seek this information.

Health Care Service Price Inquiries Calendar Years (CY) 2017-2019			
Year		Aggregate Number of Written Inquiries	Aggregate Number of Inquiries via Telephone or In- Person
<b>CY2017</b>	<b>Q1</b>		5
	<b>Q2</b>		5
	<b>Q3</b>		3
	<b>Q4</b>	1	17
<b>CY2018</b>	<b>Q1</b>		35
	<b>Q2</b>		18
	<b>Q3</b>		35
	<b>Q4</b>		16
<b>CY2019</b>	<b>Q1</b>		26
	<b>Q2</b>		42
<b>TOTAL:</b>		1	202

- b. Please describe any monitoring or analysis you conduct concerning the accuracy and/or timeliness of your responses to consumer requests for price information, and the results of any such monitoring or analysis.  
**Holyoke Medical Center maintains an electronic tracking system for all Patient Estimate Inquires received. The tracking system allows us to monitor/trend accuracy and timeliness of all responses. Our policy is to respond to the patient within 2 business days, but most are completed the same day.**
    - c. What barriers do you encounter in accurately/timely responding to consumer inquiries for price information? How have you sought to address each of these barriers?

**The only barrier we encounter in responding to the patient in a timely manner is often being unable to contact the patient to provide them with the requested information. We leave voice mail messages, but patients do not always call us back.**

3. For hospitals and provider organizations corporately affiliated with hospitals:
  - a. For each year **2016 to present**, please submit a summary table for your hospital or for the two largest hospitals (by Net Patient Service Revenue) corporately affiliated with your organization showing the hospital's operating margin for each of the following four categories, and the percentage each category represents of your total business: (a) commercial, (b) Medicare, (c) Medicaid, and (d) all other business. Include in your response a list of the carriers or programs included in each of these margins, and explain whether and how your revenue and margins may be different for your HMO business, PPO business, and/or your business reimbursed through contracts that incorporate a per member per month budget against which claims costs are settled.
  - b. For **2018 only**, please submit a summary table for your hospital or for the two largest hospitals (by Net Patient Service Revenue) corporately affiliated with your organization showing for each line of business (commercial, Medicare, Medicaid, other, total) the hospital's inpatient and outpatient revenue and margin for each major service category according to the format and parameters provided and attached as **AGO Provider Exhibit 2** with all applicable fields completed. Please submit separate sheets for pediatric and adult populations, if necessary. If you are unable to provide complete answers, please provide the greatest level of detail possible and explain why your answers are not complete.