

MASSACHUSETTS



**COMMISSION ON THE STATUS
OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

**MASSACHUSETTS PERMANENT COMMISSION
ON THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH
DISABILITIES**

FY25 ANNUAL REPORT

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Acknowledgment

The Permanent Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities Membership would like to thank individuals with disabilities, service providers, other state agencies, family members and caregivers, advocates, and local disability commissions for their collaboration and partnership.

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1 Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction

The Massachusetts Permanent Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities works to advance equity, inclusion, and opportunities for individuals with disabilities throughout the Commonwealth. Established as an independent state agency, the Commission examines barriers to access, reviews disparities in services, promotes inclusive employment and vendor opportunities, assesses state agency practices, advises policymakers, and facilitates collaboration among local disability commissions, advocacy organizations, and service providers.

During FY25 (July 2024 - June 2025), the Commission deepened its focus on disability employment, workforce supports, and health equity. The Commission strengthened its role as a convener and collaborator, bringing together community members, policymakers, employers, advocates, and service providers to address critical issues. Through quarterly public meetings, subcommittee work, and statewide events, it brought together hundreds of stakeholders, advanced data-driven discussions, and laid the groundwork for strategic community engagement initiatives that will shape future priorities.

1.2 Highlights from the Year

Commission Quarterly Meetings and Policy Discussions

The Commission held five public meetings, featuring briefings on state workforce trends, healthcare civil rights protections, and significant federal policy shifts. These discussions brought together policymakers, advocates, and service providers to share timely data and on-the-ground perspectives. Conversations highlighted projected \$1 billion Medicaid cuts, immigration-related workforce disruptions affecting direct care staffing, and national Diversity Equity and Inclusion program rollbacks, issues that directly influence access to healthcare, employment and other critical health and human services as well as the stability of the disability services workforce. Collectively, these meetings reinforced the importance of coordinated policy responses and timely collaboration across agencies and sectors to protect services and advance equity for people with disabilities.

Subcommittee Progress

The Commission's three standing subcommittees continued advancing their distinct areas of focus this year, deepening collaboration, data analysis, and community engagement across employment, workforce supports, and long-term services and supports and health equity. Each subcommittee plays a central role in helping the Commission translate community feedback into policy recommendations, identify trends affecting people with disabilities, and promote coordination across state agencies, providers, and advocacy organizations. Together, their work strengthens the Commission's ability to respond to emerging challenges and ensure that lived experience informs statewide decision-making.

The Disability Employment Subcommittee expanded employer outreach, distributed inclusion resources, and together with the Workforce Supports Subcommittee co-hosted *Strength in*

Support, a hybrid networking and resource-sharing event. The event brought together 130 participants, including employed youth and young adults with disabilities, personal care attendants, job coaches, and representatives from inclusive workplaces. The Workforce Supports Subcommittee examined persistent staffing shortages and reviewed state and national survey data, including the Center for Health Information Analysis that showed home health and human services sectors facing the highest vacancy and turnover rates, directly impacting service access.

The Long-Term Services and Supports and Health Equity Subcommittee launched its first year by examining PCA program cost trends, with projections showing spending rising from \$1.6 billion in FY24 to \$2 billion by FY27, and by convening a major statewide informational hearing to address systemic health inequities.

National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM)

The Commission hosted its second annual NDEAM celebration on October 23, 2024, at the State House and on Zoom, drawing over 300 attendees. The event honored legislative leaders, recognized inclusive employers including Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston and Eversource Energy, and featured panels on voting rights and workplace inclusion. The Disability Inclusive Workplaces: Employers and Employees Perspectives video was spotlighted, featuring MicroTek, Inc., Old Colony YMCA, and Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston.

1.3 Looking Ahead

The year ahead marks a strategic shift toward deeper community engagement and targeted implementation. The Commission is launching Meeting the Moment, a statewide series of community hearings and resource fairs beginning in November 2025, to listen directly to individuals with disabilities, families, advocates, and service providers. Attendees will also have the opportunity to connect with local organizations, state agencies, and disability commissions at the resource fair.

A new Advisory Council will bring together leaders and subject matter experts from across sectors to strengthen partnerships and guide the Commission's priorities. Subcommittees will continue to drive work on employment, workforce supports, and health equity, while monitoring key policy developments, including proposed Medicaid changes.

Through these initiatives, the Commission remains committed to ensuring that people with disabilities are full partners in shaping the Commonwealth's future, in alignment with Governor Healey's [Executive Order 646](#), which affirms the state's responsibility to advance inclusion, integration, and independence, and to expand access to the resources needed to thrive.

2 About the Commission

2.1 Mandate & Legal Authority

The Permanent Commission on the Status of Persons with Disabilities is an independent permanent state agency established by Chapter 253 of the Acts of 2020, which added Section 74 to Chapter 3 of the Massachusetts General Laws. The Commission's legislative mandate is to advance the cause of all persons with disabilities in the Commonwealth. Its statutory responsibilities include:

- i. Studying, reviewing, advising, and reporting on:
 - A. Disparities across service or geographic areas concerning the range of available options within state disability services;
 - B. The status of transportation for persons with disabilities, including access to employment opportunities;
 - C. The effect of public assistance for persons with disabilities as it pertains to earning limits and eligibility for subsidies for food, housing, child care, and other benefits;
 - D. Establishing school-to-work activities for transition-aged youth with disabilities that build a bridge to self-sufficiency and engage school supports, family members, and employers;
 - E. The status of the strategic plan to make the Commonwealth a model employer by increasing the number of people with disabilities employed by the executive branch;
 - F. Enhanced enforcement of state requirements that promote diversity in state government employment; and
 - G. The number of persons with disabilities who apply for state disability services and are unsuccessful in receiving services.
- ii. Facilitating and promoting public awareness to encourage inclusion of persons with disabilities as employees and vendors in both the public and private sectors, including underrepresented business sectors of all sizes.
- iii. Assessing programs and practices in all state agencies as they affect persons with disabilities, as the Commission deems necessary and appropriate.
- iv. Advising executive and legislative bodies regarding the impact of proposed legislation on persons with disabilities.
- v. Promoting and facilitating collaboration among local disability commissions, disability rights advocacy organizations, and disability employment service providers.

The commission shall annually, not later than October 31, report the results of its findings and activities of the preceding fiscal year and its recommendations, which may include draft legislation, to the Governor, the House and Senate Committees on Ways and Means, the Clerks of the House of Representatives and the Senate, the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities and the Joint Committee on Labor and Workforce Development.

2.2 Structure and Operations

The Commission is composed of 23 volunteer members. Membership includes legislative appointees, executive branch designees, and representatives from disability organizations across the Commonwealth. Specifically, the Commission consists of:

- Legislative Appointees
 - Three persons appointed by the President of the Senate
 - Three persons appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives
 - One person appointed by the Minority Leader of the Senate
 - One person appointed by the Minority Leader of the House of Representatives
- Executive Appointments and Designees
 - Seven persons appointed by the Governor
 - The Attorney General or designee
 - The State Treasurer or designee
 - The Secretary of the Commonwealth or designee
 - The Executive Director of the Disabled Persons Protection Commission or designee
- Organizational Representatives
 - One representative from UMass Chan Medical School's Work Without Limits
 - One representative from the Massachusetts Disability Policy Consortium
 - One representative from the Association of Developmental Disabilities Providers, Inc.
 - One representative from the Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council

Members of the Commission are drawn from diverse racial, ethnic, religious, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and socio-economic backgrounds. They are selected for their personal experience, professional background, or demonstrated interest in issues relating to persons with disabilities. The statute emphasizes that membership should reflect a broad spectrum of disabilities, as well as perspectives from family members, disability advocacy organizations, human service agencies, regional employment collaboratives, and business and labor organizations across the Commonwealth. Commissioners serve three-year terms as special state employees and may be reappointed. Officers typically include a Chair, Vice Chair, Clerk, and Treasurer, who are elected by the members.

An executive director shall be selected by the Commission and may hire staff. The executive director shall be qualified by their experience working on issues relating to persons with disabilities, organizing research and reports, advocacy and communication skills and demonstrated leadership abilities. The executive director shall not simultaneously serve as a member of the commission.

The Commission carries out its work through three primary subcommittees. These groups allow members to focus more deeply on key issue areas, engage directly with state agencies, community partners, and other stakeholders, and bring relevant information and perspectives back to the full Commission for discussion and recommendations.

Subcommittees typically meet during the months when quarterly Commission meetings are not held. This structure helps sustain momentum throughout the year by providing time for members to hear presentations, review data and reports from partner agencies, and collaborate on issues within their focus areas between full Commission sessions.

In addition, each subcommittee typically convenes at least one event, forum, or public discussion each fiscal year. These events are tied to the subcommittee's goals and serve as opportunities to share information, gather input, and strengthen partnerships across the disability community and state government.

The Commission's three standing subcommittees are:

- **Disability Employment Subcommittee** – Focuses on increasing employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities in both state government and the private sector. This includes reviewing workforce data, learning from agency initiatives, and exploring strategies that promote inclusive hiring, retention, and advancement.
- **Workforce Supports Subcommittee** – Examines the challenges affecting the human services and direct care workforce that supports people with disabilities. The subcommittee reviews workforce trends, hears from providers and agencies, and identifies issues and opportunities that affect workforce stability.
- **Long-Term Services & Supports (LTSS) and Health Equity Subcommittee** – Assesses how policies, funding decisions, and health equity efforts shape the availability and quality of long-term services and supports for people with disabilities. The subcommittee focuses on reviewing data, hearing from experts, and facilitating conversations that highlight service gaps and promising approaches.

3 FY25 Governance, Meetings, and Key Activities

3.1 Commission Membership

The Commission is guided by the leadership and expertise of the following members, who bring diverse perspectives and a shared commitment to advancing its mission:

Gyasi Burks-Abbott, Commission Elected Disability Employment Subcommittee Co-Chair

Self-Advocate, Faculty, LEND Program, Boston Children's Hospital and UMass Boston's Institute for Community Inclusion

Appointed by the Governor

Charles Carr, Commission Elected Long Term Services and Supports and Health Equity Subcommittee Co-Chair

Legislative Liaison for the Disability Policy Consortium

Appointed by Disability Policy Consortium

The Honorable Denise Garlick, Commission Elected Chair

Appointed by the Governor

Nancy Garr-Colzie

Member & Board Chair, Worcester Disability Commission, Center for Living & Working

Appointed by the Governor

Craig Hall

Executive Director, Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council

Appointed by Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council

Representative Vanna Howard

State Representative, Massachusetts House of Representatives

Appointed by the Speaker of the House

Rachel Kaprielian

Chief Executive Officer, Triangle, Inc.

Appointed by the Governor

Andrew Levrault, Commission Elected Workforce Supports Subcommittee Chair

Deputy General Counsel, Disabled Persons Protection Commission

Appointed by Disabled Persons Protection Commission

Representative Jay Livingstone

State Representative, Massachusetts House of Representatives

Appointed by the Speaker of the House

Ann Lynch

Assistant Attorney General, Disability Rights Coordinator, Massachusetts Attorney General's Office

Appointed by the Attorney General's Office

Representative John Marsi

State Representative, Massachusetts House of Representatives

Appointed by the House Minority Leader

Regina Marshall

Chief Operating Officer, Advocates

Appointed by the Senate President

Oswald Mondejar, Commission Elected Clerk

President, Mucho Gusto Consulting

Appointed by the Governor

Bridget Murphy

Project Manager, Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth, William Francis Galvin

Appointed by the State Secretary

Senator Patrick O'Connor

State Senator, Massachusetts Senate

Appointed by the Senate Minority Leader

Angela Ortiz

Chief Executive Officer, Massachusetts Health Council

Appointed by the Governor

Kathy Petkauskos

Executive Director, Workplace Equity and Inclusion, Work Without Limits, ForHealth Consulting, University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School

Appointed by the University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School

Carl Richardson, Commission Elected Long Term Services and Supports and Health Equity Subcommittee Co-Chair and Treasurer

ADA Coordinator/504 Diversity Officer, Massachusetts State House

Appointed by the Senate President

Representative Lindsay Sabadosa

State Representative, Massachusetts House of Representatives

Appointed by the Speaker of the House

Leo Sarkissian

The Arc of Massachusetts

Appointed by the Governor

Lexi Semanchik

HR Marketing & Communications Specialist, State Treasurer and Receiver General's Office
Treasurer's Office Designee #2

Rachel Stanton, Commission Elected Disability Employment Subcommittee Co-Chair

Investor Relations & Communications Designer, Clean Water Trust | Debt Management
Treasurer's Office Designee

Meghan Todd

Grants Manager, City of Framingham
Appointed by the Senate President

Christopher White, Commission Elected Vice-Chair

President/CEO, Road to Responsibility, Inc.
Appointed by the Association of Developmental Disabilities Providers, Inc.

Commissioners Emeriti

- Representative Gerard Cassidy
- Carla Kath
- Representative Kay Khan
- Felix Martinez
- Representative Mathew Muratore
- Nancy Rumbolt-Trzcinski
- Dan Shannon
- Paul W. Spooner
- Kerry Thompson
- Melinda Troy
- Liz Zelnick

3.2 Quarterly Meetings and Key Activities

The Commission held five quarterly public meetings during FY25, as well as a special session to review and approve its annual report. Meetings were conducted in a hybrid format, with in-person participation at the Massachusetts State House and remote access via Zoom. Audience members were able to participate using the Q&A feature, leaving their contact information for follow up. American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation and CART captioning were provided at each meeting to ensure accessibility and support broad statewide participation. Meeting agendas, minutes, recordings, and presentation materials were made publicly available on the Commission's website.

September 11, 2024

The Commission convened its first quarterly meeting of FY25, featuring a presentation from the Massachusetts Department of Economic Research on disability employment in state government

and the impact of “benefit cliffs”¹ on workforce participation. The analysis drew on state workforce data, the American Community Survey, and the [People with Disabilities Equity Dashboard](#) - an interactive, publicly available tool offering up-to-date insights into Massachusetts disability labor force trends, including disability type, geographic distribution, remote work prevalence, unemployment rates, and labor force participation.

Key Data Findings:

- In Q4 FY2024, approximately **3.4 % of Executive Branch employees** (about 1,550 individuals) identified as having a disability, a higher proportion than in the broader Massachusetts workforce.
- The Executive Office of Health and Human Services employ more than half of all Executive Branch workers who identify as having a disability.
- Nearly **90 %** of these employees work in professional, administrative, or clerical roles.
- **Over 75 %** have more than 10 years of service, while employees aged **20–30 are significantly underrepresented**, making up less than 2 % of those who identify as having a disability.
- Dashboard data show a **20 % increase in the number of Executive Branch employees self-identifying as having a disability since Q1 2022**, reflecting increased disclosure but also highlighting recruitment gaps for younger workers.
- Analysis of benefit programs showed that SSDI creates steep benefit cliffs while SSI benefits phase out more gradually, resulting in fewer cliffs compared to SSDI. For example, an individual receiving \$18,000 annually in SSDI benefits would need to earn at least \$36,000 to avoid a sudden drop in total income, and \$56,000 for individuals with dependents.

Recommendations Highlighted:

- Invest in targeted training and upskilling programs to help workers with disabilities secure higher-wage positions that surpass benefit cliff thresholds.
- Expand quality part-time job opportunities to provide flexible employment without triggering benefit loss.
- Explore the potential of gig work as a flexible employment pathway, paired with accessibility supports and equitable worker protections.

These findings emphasize the importance of data transparency, targeted workforce strategies, and policy coordination to address structural employment barriers. Commission members discussed opportunities for further analysis, particularly around workforce age demographics, and considered how these findings could inform future policy recommendations and employment initiatives.

¹ “Benefit cliff” or “the cliff effect” is the sudden reduction to public benefits when a person enters the workforce or household earnings increase even when earnings are not enough for self-sufficiency.

A copy of the presentation can be accessed below:

[Fostering an inclusive workforce in the Commonwealth: understanding state workforce trends and benefit cliffs](#)

November 6, 2024 (Special Meeting)

A special meeting was held to review and finalize the Commission's FY24 Annual Report prior to submission.

December 11, 2024

The Department of Developmental Services (DDS) presented its FY25 Employment Priorities, outlining strategies to expand competitive, integrated employment opportunities for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and autism. Commissioner Sarah Peterson and Director of Community, Life, and Engagement Holly McCarthy highlighted initiatives aimed at strengthening pathways to employment, deepening collaboration with partners, and leveraging technology to support workplace inclusion.

Key Priorities and Initiatives:

- Expand Community-Based Day Supports (CBDS) as a pathway to employment by offering hands-on experiences such as volunteer work, internships, and community service projects.
- Promote a pro-employment approach, setting high expectations while supporting individuals' unique employment journeys.
- Regional Employment Collaboratives: Engage chambers of commerce and small business associations to broaden employment networks.
- Business Partnerships: Partner with employers such as CVS, T.J. Maxx, and Sodexo to develop on-the-job training programs that build both worker skills and employer pipelines.
- Supplier Diversity Office Collaboration: Launch joint efforts between Regional Employment Collaboratives and the MA Supplier Diversity Office to connect individuals with certified vendors and expand employer engagement.
- School-to-Work Transitions: Collaborate with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, local schools, and MassAbility to improve access to job training and services for students transitioning to adult employment.
- Increase access to and proficiency in supportive technologies for individuals and staff to foster skill development and independence in the workplace.
- Partner with organizations such as the Institute for Community Inclusion and the Association of Developmental Disabilities Providers to expand training and share best practices.

Commission Discussion Highlights:

Commissioners raised questions about how individuals move from training to paid employment, the role of the Department of Labor in collaborative initiatives, and strategies for addressing transportation barriers. DDS shared updates on workforce retention efforts, including the Direct

Support Worker to LPN Program, which provides Direct Support Professionals with paid training to advance their careers. Last year, **18 individuals graduated from the program and 22 were enrolled as of December 2024**, reflecting concrete progress in workforce development and career mobility. Commissioners also emphasized the importance of strengthening collaboration with MassAbility to help more DDS clients transition into competitive employment.

A copy of the presentation can be accessed below:

[MA Department of Developmental Services Employment Priorities](#)

March 12, 2025

The Commission received two significant presentations addressing civil rights in healthcare and current federal policy developments affecting people with disabilities.

Civil Rights in Healthcare

Commissioner Ann Lynch, Assistant Attorney General and Disability Rights Coordinator, presented an overview of state and federal civil rights protections in healthcare settings, including recent legal developments.

Key Points:

- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the ADA prohibit disability discrimination by entities receiving federal funds and in public accommodations, including hospitals, clinics, and private medical offices.
- A multistate legal challenge is underway regarding Health and Human Services regulations that clarify gender dysphoria may be considered a disability. The Massachusetts Attorney General's Office is closely monitoring this litigation and is prepared to act to defend residents' rights.
- Healthcare providers are required to make reasonable modifications to policies and practices to ensure equal access. Examples include early appointments to reduce sensory stress, assistance with paperwork, and permitting service animals under many circumstances.
- Healthcare providers have obligations to provide interpreter services and translated or otherwise accessible materials to individuals with limited English proficiency and/or disabilities.
- The AGO has issued guidance to help healthcare providers be prepared for encounters with immigration enforcement and to remind them of their continuing obligations to protect patient rights and privacy in healthcare settings.

A copy of the presentation can be accessed below:

[Civil Rights in Healthcare](#)

Federal Policy Developments

Commissioner Craig Hall, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities

Council, presented an update on major federal fiscal and policy changes impacting people with disabilities.

Key Data and Policy Highlights:

- A 1% across-the-board rescission in discretionary spending took effect, and ongoing continuing resolutions are maintaining funding at prior-year levels without program increases.
- Approximately **1 in 4 Americans (28.7%)** has some type of disability, and Massachusetts receives roughly **\$15 billion annually** in federal funding supporting programs including Medicaid, special education, vocational rehabilitation, and housing assistance.
- In 2024, about **7.6 million Americans** identified as disabled workers; **9.4 % of the federal workforce** identified as disabled in 2022. Medicaid currently serves about **7.4 million people** who are disabled, blind, or over 65.
- Pending federal bills could add work requirements for Medicaid and SNAP. Executive Orders issued in early 2025 focus on federal workforce reductions, regulatory rollbacks, and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) program changes.

A copy of the presentation can be accessed below:

[Observations on Developments at the Federal Level Concerning People with Disabilities](#)

June 11, 2025

The Commission's final quarterly meeting of FY25 centered on leadership elections, strategic planning for FY26, and subcommittee updates highlighting statewide collaboration, advocacy, and policy priorities.

Leadership and Strategic Direction

Commissioners elected the following officers for the upcoming 3-year term:

- Chair: Honorable Denise Garlick
- Vice Chair: Chris White
- Treasurer: Carl Richardson
- Secretary: Oz Mondejar

Chair Garlick reflected on the Commission's progress during its first Executive Board term, citing key accomplishments such as robust subcommittee leadership, successful budget advocacy, and strengthened partnerships with state agencies. Looking ahead, the Commission plans to launch regional engagement efforts, establish an Advisory Council to broaden representation, and develop a formal succession and mentoring process to sustain leadership capacity.

Key Policy Concerns

Commissioners shared a series of timely policy concerns affecting the disability community:

- Federal Medicaid cuts projected to impact MassHealth by approximately \$1 billion, with potential reductions to community-based services such as the Personal Care Attendant (PCA) program and increased pressure toward institutional care.
- Immigration policy changes have resulted in more than 100 direct care workers at a single provider losing work authorization, directly affecting service continuity.
- DEI program rollbacks and federal executive actions have led to reduced employer engagement, the removal of DEI language in contracts, and decreased data collection.
- Elimination of Section 504 protections related to gender identity and dysphoria in several states, prompting national advocacy responses.
- Cuts to university disability programs and Department of Energy rule changes removing accessibility requirements in building codes were also highlighted as urgent issues.
- Commissioners emphasized the importance of timely information-sharing and collective advocacy in responding to these developments.

3.3 Attendance and Engagement Data or Stakeholder Participation Overview

Following Commissioners' feedback, the Commission began collecting data on public attendees. This initiative aims to better understand who participates in Commission meetings, strengthen outreach, and inform future engagement strategies.

Across the two meetings where data were collected (March 12 and June 11, 2025), **professionals working in the developmental disability field accounted for just over half of attendees (52.6%)**, reflecting strong engagement from service providers and agency partners. Individuals with disabilities made up a meaningful share of participation, including **15.8% identifying as a person with a developmental disability**, along with smaller groups identifying as a person with a physical disability or other disability types. Additional attendees included **family members (5.3%)**, advocates and community members (5.3%), and interested citizens (5.3%).

Participants joined both virtually and in person from different regions of the Commonwealth, reflecting the Commission's commitment to hybrid accessibility and broad statewide engagement.

4 Subcommittee Activities

4.1 Disability Employment Subcommittee

Throughout FY25, the Disability Employment Subcommittee advanced several initiatives to promote inclusive hiring practices, raise employer awareness, and address systemic barriers to workforce participation for people with disabilities. Early in the fiscal year, the subcommittee collaborated with the Department of Economic Research on benefit cliff modeling, examining how changes in earnings affect public benefits for individuals with disabilities. The analysis explored SSDI and SSI household scenarios, identified key income thresholds where benefit cliffs occur, and informed the Commission’s broader workforce discussions.

Parallel efforts focused on business engagement: building contact lists of small- and mid-sized employers, disseminating the Commission’s [Employer and Employee Perspectives](#) video, and promoting its [Guide to Creating Inclusive Workplaces](#). By late fall, the video had reached over 300 views, with a 60% email open rate, and outreach efforts targeted Chambers of Commerce, human resources agencies, and business associations to broaden dissemination.

The subcommittee also played a leading role in hosting “Strength in Support: a networking and resource-sharing event with employed youth and young adults with disabilities, personal care assistants, job coaches, and inclusive workplaces” on June 23, 2025, a joint event with the Workforce Supports Subcommittee. This hybrid networking and resource-sharing event brought together about 130 participants, split almost evenly between in-person (49.6%) and virtual (50.4%) attendance. The audience reflected a diverse cross-section of the disability and workforce communities: 47.3% were professionals working in the developmental disability field, 16.8% identified as individuals with developmental disabilities, and 15.3% were family members. Additional attendees included advocates, disability commission members, and vocational rehabilitation professionals. Speakers included workers, advocates, and employment specialists sharing real-world experiences and strategies for advancing inclusive employment. Resource tables featured partners such as the Department of Developmental Services, MassAbility, Partners for Youth with Disabilities, and JVS Boston. Attendees left with practical tools and new connections, reinforcing the Commission’s convening role and commitment to bridging workforce and disability communities.

A recording of the event and all subcommittee meeting recordings and materials can be accessed below:

[Disability Subcommittee Meetings, Materials, and Recordings](#)

4.2 Workforce Supports Subcommittee

The Workforce Supports Subcommittee dedicated FY25 to advancing a clearer understanding of the state's human services workforce crisis, one that affects the quality, stability, and accessibility of disability services across Massachusetts. Through quarterly briefings with state officials, data analysis, and national policy perspectives, the subcommittee identified workforce trends, system gaps, and promising strategies to address long-standing challenges.

State Workforce Initiatives: Significant Investments, Persistent Gaps

The Executive Office of Health and Human Services shared regular updates on major cross-secretariat efforts to build and retain a sustainable workforce across nursing, behavioral health, and direct care roles. Key state initiatives included:

- \$46 million ARPA grant program supporting home- and community-based service providers through training, recruitment, and retention.
- Free community college and transfer agreements to expand pipelines for nursing, social work, and behavioral health professions.
- \$182 million in student loan repayment for primary care and behavioral health workers over two years.
- Expanded Certified Nursing Assistant training and licensure fee waivers, 10,000 workers benefited in FY24 alone, with more planned in FY25.

Despite these investments, shortages remain acute in behavioral health and entry-level direct support roles. Immigration policy shifts have also destabilized parts of the workforce; one provider reported losing over 12 % of staff due to expiring work authorizations.

National Perspective: A Workforce in Crisis

The Administration for Community Living and the Direct Care Workforce Strategies Center provided a national lens:

- Turnover rates range from 42.8 %–64.8 %; vacancy rates are 8.5 %–11.2 %.
- 84 % of direct care workers are women; 67 % are people of color; 40 % live in low-income households.
- Providers turned away 83 % of referrals and discontinued 63 % of programs by 2022 due to staffing shortages.
- Federal initiatives such as Home and Community-Based Services Federal Opportunities Regarding Workforce and Research Data ([HCBS FORWARD](#)) aim to fill critical data gaps and support state-level recruitment and retention efforts.

A copy of this presentation can be found below:

[Addressing the Direct Workforce Shortage by the Administration for Community Living](#)

Data Spotlight: Massachusetts Workforce Survey

The subcommittee also reviewed the Center for Health Information Analysis's (CHIA) biennial Health Care and Human Services Workforce Survey to understand state-level trends:

- Highest vacancy and turnover rates are in nursing homes, home health, and human services settings.
 - Leadership diversity remains limited.
 - Top recruitment challenges: shortage of qualified applicants, noncompetitive salaries.
 - Top retention challenges: burnout, lack of scheduling flexibility, and workplace respect.
 - Workforce shortages are directly impacting access; behavioral health and home health providers report longer waitlists and intake limitations.
- The upcoming 2025 survey will add wage, overtime, and ranked strategy data to support more targeted policy responses.

A copy of this presentation can be found below:

[MA Healthcare and Human Services Workforce Survey by CHIA](#)

The subcommittee also explored how immigration policy and labor protections intersect with workforce stability.

- In April, the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office briefed members on immigrant worker protections, highlighting enforcement against wage theft, retaliation, and exploitation in direct care and Personal Care Attendant roles. Many workers face linguistic, cultural, and immigration-related barriers that affect retention and workforce sustainability.
- In May, the subcommittee received guidance on immigration enforcement and healthcare access, emphasizing that disability services should remain accessible regardless of immigration status.

Information about these topics can be found below:

[Attorney General Guidance: Information for Massachusetts Healthcare Providers Regarding Immigration Enforcement and Access to Care and Assistance Programs](#)

[Resources for Immigrants in Massachusetts](#)

All subcommittee meeting recordings and materials can be accessed below:

[Workforce Supports Subcommittee Meetings, Materials, and Recordings](#)

4.3 Long-Term Services & Supports and Health Equity Subcommittee

The Long-Term Services & Supports (LTSS) and Health Equity Subcommittee was launched in FY25 to examine how state policies, funding decisions, and healthcare practices affect the accessibility, quality, and sustainability of LTSS for people with disabilities. In its inaugural year, the subcommittee focused on building partnerships with state agencies, analyzing emerging data, and convening stakeholders to address systemic inequities in long-term healthcare.

Policy Discussions and Systems Analysis

Early meetings centered on the fiscal and structural pressures shaping Massachusetts' LTSS system. MassHealth briefed the subcommittee on demographic trends, utilization data, and financial projections, particularly for the Personal Care Attendant program, which remains one of the largest LTSS initiatives in the Commonwealth. Rising demand driven by an aging population, increased service utilization, and wage growth are expected to push PCA program expenditures **from \$1.6 billion in FY24 to approximately \$2 billion by FY27**. Members discussed the implications of these trends for state budget planning, community-based care, and workforce stability, as well as the potential impacts of federal Medicaid policy changes and crisis standards of care.

Personal Care Attendant Program Sustainability

The PCA program enables tens of thousands of individuals with disabilities and older adults to live independently in their communities. In response to rising costs, the Executive Office of Health and Human Services convened a legislatively mandated [PCA Working Group](#) in late 2024 to identify targeted cost-containment strategies. The group confirmed that demographic changes will continue to increase program demand and examined fiscal drivers between FY20 and FY24, when total costs rose by \$400 million. Roughly 23% of this increase was attributed to utilization growth, while 77% was tied to wage increases.

The working group's March 2025 report recommended three immediate actions:

- Enforce the 60-hour weekly overtime cap, projected to save approximately \$6.7 million annually.
- Strengthen program integrity by addressing fraudulent activity through data transparency and electronic verification systems.
- Eliminate redundant paperwork for members without live-in exemptions, estimated to save \$700,000 annually.

These measures could generate \$7.4 million in annual savings, approximately 0.46 percent of total PCA spending, without undermining program access. Participants emphasized that sustainability strategies must balance fiscal responsibility with equity and the preservation of community-based services, recognizing that blunt cost caps could increase reliance on more expensive and restrictive institutional care.

Informational Hearing: Advancing Health Equity for People with Disabilities

A central highlight of the subcommittee's first year was convening the Informational Hearing: Advancing Health Equity for People with Disabilities, which brought together state leaders, disability advocates, researchers, healthcare professionals, and community members to examine systemic inequities and identify strategies for advancing health equity.

Expert Presenters:

- Dr. Craig Andrade, Health Equity Compact
- Heather Watkins, Disability Rights Advocate
- Maura Sullivan, MPA, Chief Executive Officer, The Arc of Massachusetts
- Linda Long-Bellil, PhD, JD, Assistant Professor, UMass Chan Medical School
- John Madondo, RN, MSN, MBA, Chief Executive Officer, UnitedHealthcare Community Plan of MA
- Nicole Godaire, Chief Executive Officer, Brain Injury Association of Massachusetts
- Dr. Joseph Giacino, PhD, Director & Professor, Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital / Harvard Medical School
- Nassira Nicola, Deputy Director for Access and Inclusion, Office of Health Equity and Community Engagement, MA Department of Public Health
- Erica Guimarães, Deputy Director, Office of Health Equity, MassHealth
- Keith Jones, Disability Rights Advocate

Key Themes and Findings

- **Persistent Barriers to Health Care Access**
Speakers emphasized that, despite decades of progress, many people with disabilities continue to face significant barriers to receiving quality, accessible care. These include inaccessible provider offices, inadequate transportation, cost barriers, provider shortages, and limited training in complex care needs. As a result, preventive care is often delayed or avoided, and individuals rely on emergency rooms for crisis management rather than coordinated, ongoing care.
- **Health Disparities and Social Determinants of Health**
National and state data continue to show significant health disparities for people with disabilities, including higher rates of chronic illness, obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and smoking compared to the general population. Speakers highlighted the importance of recognizing **social determinants of health**, e.g., housing, economic security, food access, climate, discrimination, and toxic stress as integral to health equity. Public health leaders emphasized that health equity requires ensuring equitable access to all conditions that support health, not just medical services.
- **Gaps in Medical Education and Cultural Competency**
Fewer than half of physicians nationwide report feeling fully prepared to provide equitable care to patients with disabilities. Dr. Linda Long-Bellil and Maura Sullivan highlighted innovative medical education approaches, including integrating disability competencies into UMass Chan Medical School's curriculum and expanding Operation

House Call, a Massachusetts program that trains more than 1,200 medical and health professionals annually through family-led experiential learning. Evaluations show that this model improves communication skills, cultural competence, and understanding of systemic barriers.

- **Brain Injury Care Disparities**

Massachusetts residents experience more than 71,000 traumatic brain injuries annually requiring hospitalization or emergency care, yet only about 11 percent of patients are discharged to specialized rehabilitation. Federal regulations such as the “three-hour rule” often exclude individuals with severe injuries from rehabilitation eligibility, resulting in poorer outcomes and raising civil rights concerns. Racial and geographic disparities exacerbate these inequities. Nicole Godaire and Dr. Joseph Giacino called for reforms to improve access to rehabilitation and community supports.

- **Health System Accountability and MassHealth Initiatives**

MassHealth outlined its Quality and Equity Incentive Program (QEIP), a \$2 billion, five-year initiative to hold hospitals, Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs), Managed Care Organizations (MCOs), and behavioral health providers accountable for measuring and reducing health disparities under the state’s 1115 waiver. Key disability-focused measures include:

- Improving completeness of demographic and disability data collection to at least 80% by Year 5.
- Implementing disability competency training for patient-facing staff, with hospitals expected to reach 85% training completion by Year 5.
- Screening for and documenting disability accommodation needs at the point of care.

These efforts represent a transformational shift toward embedding equity in value-based care and holding systems accountable for structural change.

- **Public Health Perspective and Call to Action**

The Department of Public Health outlined its Health and Disability Linkages Coordination Program, inclusion grants to municipalities, interagency health access working groups, and efforts to integrate disability as a core demographic in statewide data systems. Presenters stressed that no single entity could address these challenges alone; partnerships among healthcare systems, community organizations, and policymakers are essential. John Madondo, Chief Executive Officer, UnitedHealthcare Community Plan of MA concluded by emphasizing the urgency of coordinated action to expand access, strengthen care coordination, and support home and community-based services.

Across these areas, presenters called for improved data collection, culturally responsive service models, policy reform, and sustained cross-sector collaboration to address structural and cultural drivers of health inequities.

The hearing drew about 120 attendees, with strong statewide representation. Attendance was nearly evenly split between in-person participants at the Massachusetts State House and those joining virtually via Zoom, reflecting the Commission’s commitment to hybrid accessibility.

Participants represented a broad cross-section of stakeholders:

- Individuals with disabilities and family members made up a meaningful portion of attendees, contributing lived experience and community perspectives.
- Professionals working in the disability field comprised the largest group, including service providers, healthcare professionals, advocates, and educators.
- Additional attendees included representatives from state and local agencies, advocacy organizations and academic institutions.

A recording of the event and all subcommittee meeting recordings and materials can be accessed below:

[LTSS and Health Equity Subcommittee Meetings, Materials, and Recordings](#)

5 National Disability Employment Awareness Month

The Commission hosted its second annual National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) celebration on October 23, 2024, at the Massachusetts State House and virtually via Zoom. The event drew over 300 participants, including individuals with disabilities, policymakers, employers, educators, advocates, family members, and service providers from across the Commonwealth.

The celebration emphasized two interconnected goals: advancing disability-inclusive employment and ensuring full participation in civic life through accessible voting. These priorities reflect the Commission's broader efforts to address workforce challenges while strengthening equity and inclusion across all sectors of public life.

5.1 Championing Inclusion: Honoring Employers, Employees, and Legislative Leaders

The main celebration, held in the Great Hall of Flags, highlighted achievements in disability employment and recognized key partners who are driving change. Commission Chair Denise Garlick opened the program, followed by Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll, who delivered the keynote address. Lt. Governor Driscoll emphasized the administration's commitment to expanding employment opportunities for people with disabilities through investments such as \$900,000 in employment-preparation grants for young adults and the renaming of the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission to MassAbility to reflect a more inclusive vision for the Commonwealth.

Commissioner Sarah Peterson of the Department of Developmental Services also addressed the audience, underscoring the importance of collaboration between state agencies, employers, and the disability community to advance employment equity.

Secretary of the Commonwealth William Francis Galvin provided remarks emphasizing the state's commitment to ensuring equitable access to voting information, ballots, and participation for voters with disabilities.

The Commission presented its 2024 Legislative Champions Awards to Senator Michael Barrett and Representative John Lawn, recognizing their leadership in advancing disability policy and inclusive workforce initiatives.

Two employers were honored with 2024 NDEAM Employer Awards for their exemplary practices in building inclusive workplaces:

- Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston (FHLBank Boston) received the Small- to Mid-Size Organization Award for innovative accessibility initiatives and leadership in inclusive hiring and training.

- Eversource Energy received the Large Organization Award for its AdaptAbility Business Resource Group, which fosters belonging and equitable workplace practices for employees with disabilities and caregivers.

Amanda Strange, Employment Specialist at CHAI Day and Employment Services (Jewish Family & Children’s Service), was named the 2024 Employment Support Champion, honoring her exceptional work in helping individuals with disabilities achieve meaningful, sustainable employment.

Spotlight: Disability Inclusive Workplaces Initiative

As part of the celebration, the Commission spotlighted the “Disability Inclusive Workplaces: Employers and Employees Perspectives” video, which elevates real-world examples of inclusive hiring and workplace practices. Organizations from different sectors shared how they cultivate environments that welcome and support employees with disabilities.

This feature included MicroTek, Inc., Old Colony YMCA Plymouth Branch, and Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston, whose experiences demonstrate how intentional inclusion strategies yield tangible benefits for businesses, employees, and communities. Their stories were featured in a short video presentation shown during the event and are complemented by the Commission’s Guide to Creating Inclusive Workplaces, a practical resource for employers of all sizes looking to strengthen disability inclusion efforts.

The video and guide can be accessed below:

[Disability Inclusive Workplace: Employer and Employee Perspectives Video and Guide to Creating Inclusive Workplace](#)

5.2 Accessible Democracy: Voting Rights Panel

The day opened with a Voting Rights Panel titled “Accessible Democracy: Every Vote Counts,” held at the State House and livestreamed to remote attendees. Moderated by self-advocate Keith Jones and Commissioner Regina Marshall, the panel featured:

- Maura Sullivan, The Arc of Massachusetts
- Barbara L’Italien, Disability Law Center
- Olivia Thompson, Partners for Youth with Disabilities
- Commissioner Bridget Murphy, Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth & Commission member

Panelists discussed barriers to voting, including accessibility gaps at polling places and lack of standardized accommodations, as well as opportunities to increase access through technology, outreach, and inclusive policy.

5.3 Inclusion in Action: Employment Fireside Chat

The day concluded with the “Inclusion in Action: Bridging Gaps in Disability Employment” fireside chat, held at the State House and on Zoom. Moderated by Undersecretary of Labor Josh Cutler and Commissioner Oswald Mondejar, the panel featured:

- Greg Martin, Secretariat CIO, Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs
- Mark Feinour, Senior Vice President, Support Services Executive, Bank of America
- Sarah Wiles, Client Assistance Program, MA Office on Disability
- David McGrath, Food Service Assistant, Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital

Panelists shared perspectives from both employer and employee viewpoints, discussing inclusive hiring practices, workplace accommodations, and strategies to reduce stigma and systemic barriers in employment.

Recordings of this event can be accessed below:

[2024 National Disability Employment Awareness Month Event Series Schedule, Registration Links and Recordings](#) and [Video Highlight](#)

6 Looking Ahead

The year ahead represents an important strategic shift for the Commission. Building on the momentum of statewide convenings, legislative engagement, and cross-sector collaboration, the Commission is deepening its focus on community listening, partnership-building, and targeted implementation efforts that advance equity for people with disabilities across Massachusetts.

6.1 Meeting the Moment: Community Hearings Resource Fair Series

In November 2025, the Commission will launch Meeting the Moment, a statewide series of community hearings designed to listen and learn directly from individuals with disabilities, families, caregivers, service providers, and advocates. The inaugural event will take place on Tuesday, November 4, 2025, from 5 to 7 p.m. at Needham Town Hall, with hybrid participation available on Zoom. These hearings are intended to:

- Deepen engagement with communities across Massachusetts;
- Elevate and document local concerns related to rights, access, and service delivery;
- Strengthen relationships with municipal disability commissions and advocacy networks; and
- Incorporate community input into the Commission’s statewide agenda and annual reporting.

Each event will combine a community testimony session with a resource fair connecting participants to state agencies, local disability commissions, and community organizations. Testimony can be submitted in advance or shared live during the hearing, ensuring that a broad range of perspectives inform the Commission’s future work. Learn more and register below:

[Meeting the Moment Information and Registration](#)

6.2 Establishing the Advisory Council

To further expand its capacity and reach, the Commission is launching a new Advisory Council. This cross-sector body will bring together up to 30 leaders and subject-matter experts to serve as thought partners, strategic advisors, and champions for disability inclusion across Massachusetts. The Council’s objectives include:

- Providing timely input on barriers and opportunities;
- Connecting the Commission to networks, institutions, and resources;
- Amplifying disability inclusion statewide; and
- Supporting public initiatives and co-sponsored events.

Chaired by Commission Executive Board Member Oz Mondejar, with strategic coordination by Executive Director Imene Bouziane Saidi, the Advisory Council will convene experts across key

sectors including healthcare, transportation, housing, education, employment and business, media and communications, and local disability commissions.

6.3 Continuing Strategic Initiatives and Dissemination

The Commission will continue to disseminate key resources and initiatives statewide, including the widely viewed Disability Inclusive Workplaces: Employers and Employees Perspectives video and the Guide to Creating Inclusive Workplaces, ensuring that employers, policymakers, and advocates can apply practical tools to advance inclusion.

Subcommittees will maintain their focus on employment, workforce supports, and long-term services and supports and health equity, continuing to receive regular state updates and driving forward key initiatives identified during the past year. This includes monitoring policy developments such as proposed Medicaid changes, which have direct implications for access to services and supports for people with disabilities and their families.

7 Closing Reflections

The work of advancing equity and inclusion for people with disabilities across Massachusetts is collective, ongoing, and deeply rooted in partnership. Over the past year, the Commission has strengthened its role as a convener, collaborator, and catalyst for change, bringing together community members, state leaders, service providers, employers, and advocates to address critical barriers and shape solutions.

The Commission remains steadfast in its commitment to ensuring that people with disabilities are full partners in shaping the Commonwealth's policies, programs, and future. Through expanded community engagement, strategic partnerships, and targeted initiatives, we will continue to work toward a Massachusetts where every person with a disability can thrive, participate fully, and be recognized for their contributions.

We extend our sincere gratitude to all Commissioners, community members, state agencies, legislators, partner organizations, employers, and advocates who have shared their expertise, time, and voices this year. Your partnership is essential to this work.

Together, we are building a more inclusive and equitable Commonwealth.