



COMMISSION ON RACIAL EQUITY IN PUBLIC HEALTH

CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY

January 2026 Report to the Connecticut General Assembly’s Public Health and Appropriations Committees and to the Office of Policy and Management

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Strategic Planning Updates

In October 2025, the strategic planning contract with UConn Health Disparities Institute (UConn HDI) was extended. The contract extension allows the Commission and UConn HDI to continue their community engagement work specifically relating to the dissemination of the strategic plan. The contract will end in November 2026.

The strategic plan contained four key recommendations:

1. Make healthcare more affordable and reduce medical debt.
2. Increase the availability and accessibility of healthy and affordable housing.
3. Improve childcare accessibility and affordability.
4. Ensure people in re-entry or involved in the criminal legal system have access to healthy, affordable housing.

The recommendations were accompanied by a cross-cutting recommendation to create an execution and monitoring plan for every policy to ensure equitable implementation.

As we move forward with dissemination, UConn HDI has assembled a team of **Community Dissemination Champions (CDC)**. The CDC team is comprised of four individuals who were involved in the strategic planning process. The CDC team includes:

- Leslie Brown
- Armando Jimenez
- Stephanie Lazarus
- DeLita Rose-Daniels

To assist with dissemination, UConn HDI has also enlisted the help of Health Equity Solutions and Indelible Impressions as partners. The primary objective of the dissemination plan is to promote the strategic plan, important issues addressed in the plan, and how residents will benefit from its implementation as well as how the plan is aligned with existing efforts in the state. The audience for our dissemination effort includes the general public, community advocates and organizers, community-based organizations, public health practitioners, health care providers, and health care leaders. Planning is underway with the Commission and UConn HDI to prepare events, outreach, and other modes to spread awareness of the strategic plan across Connecticut.

Forum on Health Coverage

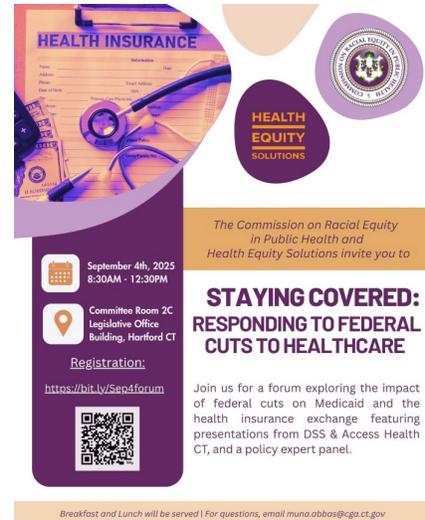
On September 4th, the Commission cohosted a [forum](#) with Health Equity Solutions entitled *Staying Covered: Responding to Federal Cuts to Healthcare*. The event brought together representatives from the Department of Social Services, Access Health Connecticut, health coverage policy experts, health service providers, and government leaders.

Forum Participants:

- **Commissioner Andrea Barton Reaves**, Department of Social Services
- **Deputy Commissioner Peter Hadler**, Department of Social Services
- **James Michel**, Access Health CT

Panelists:

- **Alexander Reger** (Moderator) – Office of Health Strategy
- **Dr. Linda Barry** – UConn School of Medicine
- **Sabrina Corlette** – Center for Health Insurance Reforms at Georgetown University
- **Eva Stahl** – Undue Medical Debt



Department of Social Services Commissioner, Andrea Barton-Reaves, and Deputy Commissioner, Peter Hadler, discussed how federal cuts from House Resolution 1 (HR 1, also known as One Big Beautiful Bill Act or OBBBA) will impact Medicaid enrollees in Connecticut.

Access Health CT CEO James Michel presented on the financial impact facing families should Congress fail to extend the Enhanced Premium Tax Credits by the end of 2025.

Comptroller Sean Scanlon also gave brief remarks at the event. He highlighted the need for the state to make a plan to address the coverage crisis which many residents in the state are facing.

Following the remarks from the speakers, the forum continued with a roundtable discussion moderated by Alex Reger from the Office of Health Strategy, alongside Sabrina Corlette, Eva Marie Stahl, and Dr. Linda Barry, as participants.

The forum concluded with remarks from Executive Director Charmchi Goodwin underscoring the urgency of the situation and the need for actionable solutions to prevent many Connecticut residents from losing coverage.

Healthcare Affordability Workgroup

Having emerged as a priority during the strategic planning process, combined with changes from HR 1, federal rulemaking, and the unlikely extension of the Enhanced Premium Tax Credits, the Commission noted the growing urgency to address healthcare affordability. To address this issue, the Commission convened a healthcare affordability workgroup. The goal of the workgroup is to develop practical and affordable healthcare options for Connecticut residents that could be considered by policymakers in the upcoming legislative session.

The group includes representatives from the Office of the Healthcare Advocate, Office of the State Comptroller, healthcare advocates, partners in philanthropy, and legislators. Technical assistance is provided by national experts with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's [State Health & Values Strategies](#) program.

The technical assistance team includes:

- **Sabrina Corlette**, Center on Health Insurance Reforms at Georgetown University
- **Jason Levitis**, Urban Institute
- **Karen Siegel**, Health Equity Solutions

The group expects to continue to meet through early 2026 as it explores policy ideas and discusses next steps.

2026 Legislative Session Priorities

During the 2026 Legislative Session, the commission will monitor proposed bills and provide policy analysis and testimony in key areas which include:

- Health coverage and/or affordability,
- Hospital consolidations and contracts,
- Private equity in healthcare and housing, and
- Bills aligned with the strategic plan recommendations.

Due to increasing affordability concerns, the Commission will actively follow legislation addressing healthcare costs during the upcoming session. The commission anticipates some bills from prior sessions will reappear before the legislature in 2026. Some of these bills are discussed below.

Hospital Financial Assistance

In 2025, [SB 1192](#), *An Act Concerning Hospital Financial Assistance*, provided for an online financial assistance portal, in addition to other measures including medical debt initiatives and requiring hospitals to notify the state of changes to their financial assistance policies. The bill was incorporated into [HB 7287](#) (Section 182), which was passed into law. In the upcoming session, the Commission expects the legislature to revisit hospital financial assistance in the upcoming session and will be prepared to offer testimony and/or recommendations.

Healthcare Access

Also in 2025, [HB 7039](#), *An Act Concerning Health Insurance*, sought to address the issue of retroactive denials (aka clawbacks). A [report](#) by the Connecticut chapter of the National Association of Social Workers showed that social workers are increasingly reluctant to accept insurance and are considering moving to a self-pay model which would require patients to pay for care out of pocket, and potentially seek reimbursement from their insurance providers. Moving to such a model could have equity implications. The Commission will follow possible developments on this bill.

Private Equity

During the 2025 Legislative Session, [HB 6873](#), *An Act Strengthening the Review of Health Care Entity Transactions*, sought to address private equity in health care. The bill, proposed by the Governor, aimed to provide the Attorney General with oversight on healthcare mergers, acquisitions, and other transactions. It also sought to allow the Offices of the Attorney General and Health Strategy to collaborate on reviewing transactions and determining compliance with antitrust laws and/or certificate of need processes.

The bill was reported favorably out of the Public Health and Appropriations Committee, tabled a second time for the House, where it was never called. The Commission anticipates the bill's return in the upcoming session and will be prepared to offer testimony and/or recommendations.

Implementation of Racial and Ethnic Impact Statements (REIS)

During the 2025 session, the Connecticut General Assembly passed legislation (SB 1506, [PA 25-27](#)) on a bipartisan basis to facilitate the operationalization of Racial Ethnic Impact Statements (REIS) in the legislative process. The statute formally designated the Commission as the preparer of the statements. Legislators will be able to request REIS on certain proposed bills. The statements will provide an analysis of a bill's projected impact on racial and ethnic disparities. REIS will report if the bill is projected to widen, narrow, or have no impact on currently existing racial and ethnic disparities in matters such as health, education, economics, and any other outcomes for which measurement is available.

Since passage of the act, the Commission has hired Principal Commission Analyst, Dr. Nancy Becerra-Cordoba to oversee REIS and is currently in the process of hiring an additional analyst to support this work.

Dr. Becerra-Cordoba started with the Commission on October 17, 2025. She immediately began her work by preparing a draft process and sample documents for REIS implementation. These documents were shared with members from all four caucuses and colleagues from the non-partisan offices at the General Assembly (LCO, OFA, OLR).

The Commission held a working meeting to discuss and workshop a proposed REIS process with the caucuses and non-partisan offices. Attendees from different caucuses and offices provided the Commission with valuable feedback. This feedback will inform the pilot process during the 2026 legislative session. The pilot will test the efficacy of the proposed process, particularly the time needed to prepare statements, the volume of statements that can be produced, and how REIS will work alongside other parts of the legislative process and timelines.

Involvement with State Committees, Boards, and Summits

Opioid Settlement Advisory Committee (OSAC)

Pareesa Charmchi Goodwin and Gretchen Shugarts, Commission Analyst, have continued to represent the Commission on the Opioid Settlement Advisory Committee (OSAC) and its research and data subcommittee. OSAC was established in 2022, in accordance with C.G.S. § 17a-674d, to ensure the proceeds received by the state from the opioid litigation settlement agreements are allocated appropriately towards substance use disorder abatement. Both the subcommittee and advisory body remain active in reviewing applications for funding.

An interactive [dashboard](#) was developed which includes data on opioid settlement expenditures to date. The dashboard also provides a brief description of a project, its status, and if applicable, funding amounts and partners. Additionally, the dashboard contains expenditure data for the following categories: treatment, recovery, prevention, and harm reduction.

Children’s Behavioral Health Plan Implementation Advisory Board

Charmchi Goodwin is an ex-officio member of this advisory body, established by the CGA to advise the Department of Children and Families on the State’s [plan](#) to address children’s behavioral health.

Office of the State Comptroller Healthcare Summits

The Comptroller’s Healthcare Cabinet continues its work discussing obstacles faced by Connecticut residents and possible policy solutions. Shugarts has continued to represent the Commission in the Comptroller’s Healthcare Cabinet meetings and its Urban Equity & Disparities subcommittee. The 2026 Healthcare Cabinet Report is expected to be released in early 2026.

Race, Ethnicity, Language (REL) Data Activities

Shugarts has remained an active participant of both the Office of Health Strategy’s REL state agency convening as well as Yale University’s REL network.

Office of Health Strategy

The Office of Health Strategy convened a workgroup consisting of members representing state agencies which included DMHAS, DPH, DSS, OPM, Access Health CT, and the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health. The workgroup was tasked with developing a [Health Equity Dashboard](#).

The dashboard, which went live in fall 2025, is an interactive tool that brings together social drivers of health (such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, housing, transportation) and health outcomes. The dashboard incorporates measures such as the Social Vulnerability Index and the Area Deprivation Index with data from Connecticut’s All-Payer Claims Database and Department of Public Health, among others. Shugarts worked closely with OHS to assist with developing the dashboard.

Commission Presentations

In September 2025, Associate Commission Analyst Abbas presented at the Connecticut Association of Diversity & Equity Professionals (CADEP) Annual Meeting to provide updates on the Commission’s activities including the strategic plan and implementation of REIS.

In October 2025, Abbas gave guest lectures to students at UConn School of Medicine, School of Dentistry, and School of Public Policy on topics including social determinants of health and working in government.

Commission Meetings

September 11, 2025 – Regular Meeting

Executive Director Charmchi Goodwin provided a review of the September 4th Staying Covered forum, provided an update on the implementation of Racial Ethnic Impact Statements, and an update on the strategic planning process with UConn HDI. Previous meeting minutes were adopted. The meeting agenda and minutes can be found [here](#). The CT-N recording of the meeting can be found [here](#).

December 11, 2025 – Regular Meeting

Associate Commission Analyst Abbas provided an update on Racial Ethnic Impact Statements including the pilot process for the upcoming year. Executive Director Charmchi Goodwin spoke about the Healthcare Planning Workgroup which has been formed to explore health coverage affordability options for policymakers to consider. Dr. Sprague Martinez from UConn HDI provided an update on the Commission’s strategic plan dissemination. Previous meeting minutes were adopted. The meeting

[agenda](#) can be found on the Commission website. Meeting minutes will be posted after they are approved by the Advisory Body at the March 2026 meeting. The CT-N recording of the meeting can be found [here](#).

2026 Commission Meetings

Regular Commission meetings are scheduled for 10:00am-11:30am on the second Thursday of March, June, September, and December. Meetings can be held virtually, in-person, or hybrid. The location and mode of meetings is included in publicly posted meeting agendas, which can be found on the [Commission website](#) and the [State Agency Public Meeting Calendar](#).

2026 Meeting Dates:

March 12th

June 11th

September 11th

December 10th

Additional Commission Information

Dr. Nancy Becerra-Cordoba was hired and began working with the Commission on October 17th and will be the primary Racial and Ethnic Impact Statement (REIS) analyst. The Commission is in the process of hiring a Commission Analyst I to work on REIS under Dr. Becerra-Cordoba. The Commission Analyst I candidate pool closed early December.

Advisory Body Appointments

The existing roster of appointed Advisory Body members is provided in the chart. Since the last report, the Senate President Pro Tem appointed Dr. Kristina Talbert-Slagle, Assistant Professor at Yale School of Medicine, as the cochairperson of the Commission alongside Ayesha R. Clarke, who serves at the pleasure of the Speaker of the House. One vacancy remains on the Advisory Body and is noted in red text below.

No.	Auth	Appointer	Qualifications in Statute	Appointee
1	SPRO	Looney, Martin M	a health disparities expert affiliated with an academic research institution and shall serve as cochairperson	Kristina Talbert-Slagle
2	SPRO	Looney, Martin M	a representative of a violence intervention program using a health-based approach to examine individuals' post-incarceration and policies for integration	Jahad, Leonard
3	SPRO	Looney, Martin M	a representative of a philanthropic entity that focuses on racial equity	Donelson, Tiffany
4	SPKH	Ritter, Matthew	a representative of a nonprofit organization that focuses on health policy and racial equity issues and shall serve as cochairperson	Clarke, Ayesha
5	SPKH	Ritter, Matthew	a representative of a nonprofit organization that focuses on racial equity and community engagement	Hamilton-Burgess, Chavon
6	SPKH	Ritter, Matthew	an expert in immigration policy and law	López, Barbara

7	SMAJ	Duff, Bob	a representative of a nonprofit that focuses on equitable housing policy	Mirza, Faryal
8	SMAJ	Duff, Bob	a medical professional with expertise in diversity, equity and inclusion policy	Santos, Melissa
9	HMAJ	Rojas, Jason	a representative of a nonpartisan criminal justice policy and research entity	O'Rourke, Patricia
10	HMAJ	Rojas, Jason	a biostatistician or epidemiologist with knowledge of the effects of social-structural factors on health	Njoku, Anuli
11	SMIN	Clarke, Ayesha ¹	a public health educator or researcher affiliated with an academic institution	Santella, Anthony
12	SMIN	Harding, Stephen	a current or former educator, school counselor or school nurse with public policy experience	Vacant
13	HMIN	Clarke, Ayesha ²	an expert in environmental impacts on human health who affiliated with an academic institution	Brugge, Douglas
14	HMIN	Candelora, Vincent J	a representative of a nonprofit that focuses on economic research and policy	Charmelus, Carline
15	BPRC CHR	Miller, Patricia Billie	an education policy researcher affiliated with an academic research institution	Cotto, Robert

¹ Pursuant to Public Act No. 23-204 Sec. 197(b)(5) and Sec. 197 (d) Chairs may appoint qualified individuals after a 60-day vacancy period. This designation holds until a successor is appointed pursuant to PA 23-204 Sec. 197(b)(5).

² Ibid.