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Health and Human Service Leaders Explore Impact of Immigration Policies on Health

MLPB shares best practices for meeting health needs of immigrant families

[Speaker Bios](#)

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Boston, MA: Today at the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center, MLPB [convened 100 interdisciplinary leaders](#) from MA, RI, and beyond to strengthen their ability to serve immigrants. As a result of changing federal policies, immigrant families are confronting new barriers to food, housing, transportation and personal and family safety and stability. Health and human service providers play an important role in improving the health and quality of life for immigrants in our communities.

Administrators, physicians, nurses, social workers, community health workers, public health professionals, lawyers, and policymakers came together to learn best practices for effective, immigrant-friendly service delivery. Significantly, these stakeholders are operating in an increasingly integrated healthcare and human services ecosystem, the result of state efforts to implement value-based, accountable care.

“Healthcare teams often are the ‘first responders’ when people confront barriers to basic resources and being able to address the needs of immigrants is particularly critical right now,” said **Audrey Shelto**, President of the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation. “The stakes are so high, and providers of all types want to be well-informed so they can best serve their communities. The time is now to share learning and build an infrastructure that better integrates social needs with clinical and behavioral health care,” she added.

According to **Dr. Leah Zallman** of Cambridge Health Alliance and the Institute for Community Health, “the proposed change to the federal ‘public charge’ rule alone makes care delivery to immigrant patients challenging, since a natural reaction is to withdraw from care and forgo pursuing health-promoting benefits and services - even for eligible household members such as U.S. citizen children.” The “public charge” rule modification proposed by the federal government would make it harder for legal immigrants to apply for green cards and other kinds of status if they or a household member have accessed certain public benefits for which they are eligible.

Julian Rodríguez-Drix, asthma program manager at the Rhode Island Department of Health, observed: “This unpredictable policy environment raises hard questions for organizations about how to document case management efforts in a person-centered way.” Health and human service providers want to learn how they can document communication with patients/clients about their social, economic, and environmental needs and not put people at risk.

Grounded in MLPB's expertise in current workforce and community needs, the event highlighted:

- The current state of federal immigration laws and policies, and how they are affecting individuals and families in MA, RI and beyond;
- The ways in which immigration status itself impacts health and well-being, especially in relation to accessing food, housing, transportation and protection from domestic violence;
- Strategies to build and maintain trust with patients confronting immigration challenges (see [A Strengths-based Approach to Screening Families for Health-related Social Needs](#), a brief co-authored by MLPB this past year); and
- A pioneering protocol developed by Boston Medical Center for documenting immigration-related communications with patients in the medical record.

“With the introduction of value-based financing, healthcare and human service organizations are in deep dialogue about how best to combine forces to serve vulnerable populations,” said MLPB CEO **Samantha Morton**. “MLPB wants to ensure the expanding health workforce is well-prepared to serve all people regardless of immigration status.”

About MLPB: MLPB equips health and human service workforces with upstream problem-solving strategies that improve people's social determinants of health. Leveraging our public interest law expertise, we advance health equity for individuals, families, and communities. In 2018, MassHealth approved MLPB as a DSRIP (Delivery System Reform Incentive Payment) Technical Assistance vendor for accountable care organizations and Community Partners in the following domains:

- Care Coordination/Integration
- Community-Based Care and Social Determinants of Health
- Flexible Services
- Population Health Management
- Workforce

For further information see <https://www.mlpboston.org/> or contact Meg Baker to schedule an interview with MLPB staff and/or stakeholders.

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