

2021
SUMMER
FELLOWSHIP
PROGRAM
FELLOW PROJECTS & REFLECTIONS

2021 SUMMER FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

The annual Health Policy Commission (HPC) Summer Fellowship Program has dual goals of helping to achieve the Commonwealth's health care reform and cost containment goals while simultaneously providing hands-on educational opportunities to the next generation of health policy leaders. Each year, the Fellowship Program affords students the opportunity to engage in a ten week, stand-alone policy or research project within one of the HPC's departments. As temporary full-time employees, fellows work closely with their supervisors to ensure they meet project benchmarks, deliver key presentations, and meet deadlines. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the temporary closure of the HPC's offices, the 2021 Summer Fellowship Program was conducted on an exclusively virtual basis.

PEOPLE AND PROCESS

Applicants to this highly competitive program must be enrolled in a full-time master's, PhD, law, or medical program. For the 2021 Fellowship Program, the HPC received more than 200 applications from over 70 universities around the world. The HPC is committed to embedding diversity, equity, and inclusion as core components of its hiring process. To reduce bias in the Fellowship Program selection process, identifying information including names and universities were redacted from applications upon receipt. After reviewing the redacted materials, HPC staff conducted virtual interviews with dozens of top applicants. Candidates were invited for interviews based on prior professional experience and their interests in health policy as outlined in their application materials. The ideal HPC fellow is a strong problem-solver, a clear and concise writer of technical and policy content, and possesses the ability to understand multiple stakeholder perspectives. Successful candidates are collaborative, entrepreneurial, self-motivated, and passionate about health policy.

STIPEND AND PROGRAMMING

In 2021, fellows were paid \$20 per hour for up to ten weeks (375 hours) of work. To enhance their time with the HPC, fellows were included in various activities and meetings and given access to some of the Commonwealth's most cutting-edge and forward-thinking policy making processes and staff.

Fellows worked remotely and connected daily with their teams to guide a project from inception to completion, while also exploring the intersection of HPC goals and their own academic interests. In addition to their primary projects, fellows were offered a host of virtual programming and networking opportunities to allow them to better understand the varied facets of the HPC's work. Examples included:

- Joining virtual policy meetings with HPC staff and key stakeholders;
- Attending virtual meetings of the HPC's Board of Commissioners and policy sub-committees;
- Participating in small, interactive virtual meetings on health policy with HPC commissioners and Advisory Council members; and
- Meeting with HPC staff from across the agency virtually in cross-functional breakout discussions

At the conclusion of the summer, fellows were asked to share the product of their work and reflect on the Fellowship Program in an eight-minute presentation to HPC leadership and staff.

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF STAFF (COS)

The Office of the Chief of Staff (COS) ensures that the HPC delivers timely, high-quality work and informs the public and stakeholders of the HPC's mission, policies, and programs in a consistent and credible manner. This is completed through management of the HPC's external affairs efforts, including media, public, legislative, intergovernmental, and stakeholder relations. COS also manages the day-to-day administration of the HPC, including agency operations, human resources, fiscal management, special projects, and public events. Coleen Elstermeyer, MPP, Deputy Executive Director, leads this department and provides high-level strategic guidance to HPC staff and Board members.

OFFICE OF THE GENERAL COUNSEL (OGC)

The Office of the General Counsel (OGC) provides legal counsel and advice on a wide range of strategic, policy, and operational issues for the agency. The Legal department is responsible for supporting the HPC's policy and legal work, including the development of regulations and oversight of agency compliance functions. The Office of the General Counsel is led by Lois H. Johnson, Esq.

HEALTH CARE TRANSFORMATION AND INNOVATION (HCTI)

The Health Care Transformation and Innovation (HCTI) department is responsible for developing a coordinated strategy to advance care delivery transformation policy and programs, including developing and implementing the agency's investment strategy. HCTI is responsible for administering several grant programs designed to catalyze care delivery transformation in the Commonwealth. The Community Hospital Acceleration, Revitalization, and Transformation ([CHART](#)) program, the Health Care Innovation Investment ([HCII](#)) program, and the [SHIFT-Care Challenge](#) collectively represent a key component of the HPC's efforts to increase health care quality, equity, and access while reducing cost growth in the Commonwealth. HCTI also advances the Commonwealth's goals of accelerating adoption of new integrated care models through state [certification programs](#) for patient-centered medical homes (PCMHs) and accountable care organizations (ACOs) and enhanced transparency of such efforts. The department – in collaboration with other state agencies and stakeholders — works to promote and align innovative care delivery and payment models and address upstream causes of poor health outcomes. Through these efforts, HCTI supports the HPC's vision of a care delivery system that reduces spending and improves health for all residents by delivering coordinated, patient-centered, and efficient health care that reflects patients' behavioral, social, and medical needs. HCTI is led by Kelly Hall.

MARKET OVERSIGHT AND TRANSPARENCY (MOAT)

The Market Oversight and Transparency (MOAT) department is responsible for advancing the HPC's statutory charge to encourage a more value-based health care market. This includes (1) developing and implementing a first-in-the-nation [Registration of Provider Organizations](#) (RPO) program to provide transparency on the composition and function of provider organizations in the health care system, (2) tracking and evaluating the impact of significant health care provider changes on the competitive market and on the state's ability to meet the health care cost growth benchmark through review of [material change notices](#) (MCNs) and [cost and market impact reviews](#) (CMIRs), (3) evaluating the performance of individual health care providers and payers which threaten the health care cost growth benchmark and overseeing [Performance Improvement Plans](#) (PIPs) to improve the cost performance of such entities, and (4) collaborating with other HPC departments to catalyze improvements in the performance of the health care system. Beginning in 2021, the MOAT team also helps manage pharmaceutical spending by conducting reviews of high-cost drugs referred to the HPC by MassHealth, the Massachusetts Medicaid Program, and assessing if the pricing is unreasonable or excessive in relation to the value. MOAT is led by Kate Scarborough Mills, Esq., MPH.

OFFICE OF PATIENT PROTECTION (OPP)

The Office of Patient Protection (OPP) safeguards important rights of health insurance consumers. Implementing certain provisions of [M.G.L. Chapter 176O](#), OPP regulates the internal grievance process for consumers who wish to challenge denials of coverage by health plans and regulates and administers the external review process for consumers who seek further review of adverse determinations by health plans based on medical necessity. OPP is also charged with regulating similar internal and external review processes for patients of Risk Bearing Provider Organizations and HPC-certified ACOs. OPP also administers and grants enrollment waivers to eligible individuals who seek to purchase non-group insurance when open enrollment is closed. Additionally, OPP assists consumers with general questions or concerns relating to health insurance. OPP is led by Nancy Ryan, Esq., MPH.

RESEARCH AND COST TRENDS (RCT)

The Research and Cost Trends (RCT) department fulfills the HPC's statutory charge to examine spending trends and underlying factors and to develop evidence-based recommendations for strategies to increase the efficiency of the health care system. Using key data sources such as the state's all-payer claims database (APCD) and cutting edge methods, RCT draws on significant research and analytical expertise to inform, motivate, and support action to achieve the benchmark and the goals of Chapter 224. RCT is responsible for producing the HPC's [annual health care cost trends report](#) and contributes subject matter expertise to the [annual hearing](#) on cost trends as well as special research projects as determined by the Executive Director and the Board. RCT is led by David Auerbach, PhD.

HPC SUMMER FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM REFLECTIONS



**ISABELLE
ALEXANDRE**
Boston University
School of Public
Health

ISABELLE ALEXANDRE

HCTI

This summer, I had the pleasure of working with the Health Care Transformation and Innovation (HCTI) team, on their Birth Equity and Support through the Inclusion of Doula Expertise (BESIDE) investment program. As an MPH student specializing in Health, Policy and Law and Maternal and Child Health, I was heavily interested in seeking a summer position where I could combine both my policy interest and my passion for maternal health. Therefore, I am truly grateful to have taken part in the Health Policy Commission's fellowship program because it has given me insight on the field of policy, as well as expanded my knowledge on maternal health.

For my summer projects, I conducted a landscape analysis of the Massachusetts doula workforce and developed a technical assistance resource compilation. I completed a literature review on relevant topics related to the doula workforce such as recruitment, training, certification, roles and responsibilities, workforce diversity, and reimbursement of doula services. Additionally, I assembled a list of publicly available resources for BESIDE applicants to use as a guiding tool in the creation of their programs. These included resources centered around integrating a health equity and cultural humility lens while simultaneously promoting an environment of mutual respect and understanding among doulas and clinical/administrative staff.

I am forever grateful for the opportunity to have participated in this fellowship and worked alongside team members who are committed to eliminating health disparities through innovative programs. I would like to thank my supervisor and the HCTI team for the opportunity to work with them this summer and for their continued help and guidance. Despite being remote, I felt closely connected to my team members and HPC staff due the wide array of programming and networking opportunities made available to us.



GRAY BABBS
Brown University
School of Public
Health

GRAY BABBS

RCT

As a summer fellow, I supported the Research and Cost Trends (RCT) team in their maternal health research. My project sat at the intersection of previous RCT work that documents rising total spending in perinatal care and rising out-of-pocket spending in the Commonwealth. Using the All Payer Claims Database, my project characterized out-of-pocket spending (copay, coinsurance, and deductible) on perinatal care of commercially insured Massachusetts residents. I examined insurance benefit design, prices, payers, and hospital-level factors that influence out-of-pocket spending on prenatal, labor and delivery, and postpartum care. In other words: how much does it cost to have a baby in Massachusetts? Is this cost rising? Why might that be?

Through this work, I learned what it means to do high quality government-based research— from prioritizing important questions to conducting rigorous analysis to developing smart health communications. I developed a number of skills including how to use claims data and how to use Stata. By far, the most important things I am taking away from this summer are connections. Commissioners, Advisory Council members, current HPC staff (especially my incredible supervisor, Sasha Albert), former fellows, and current fellows all have given generously of their time and expertise. I am grateful that I have learned so much from the knowledgeable and thoughtful members of the greater HPC community, and I look forward to continuing to learn from them.



**AKSHAYAA
CHITTIBABU**

David Geffen School
of Medicine at UCLA

AKSHAYAA CHITTIBABU

COS

This summer, I had the wonderful opportunity to work as a fellow in the Office of the Chief of Staff (COS) at the Massachusetts Health Policy Commission (HPC). I initially came to the HPC to learn more about state government and its capacities to improve health outcomes and patient care. I was able to do this and much more during my time as a fellow through opportunities to attend hearings of the MA State Legislature, conduct project work in the realm of health literacy, and speak with various state leaders and HPC staff members about their work.

I worked on two main projects this summer in legislative affairs and health literacy. The former was focused on tracking HPC-relevant bills in the MA State Legislature and attending hearings focused on areas the HPC is interested in. Listening to vulnerable testimonies from MA patients about topics like step therapy, home care for medically fragile children, and unaffordable prescription drugs was a moving and sobering experience that reinforced my desire to use my future patient care experiences as a doctor to inform progressive patient-centered legislation and improve health outcomes. As someone aspiring to pursue a career as a physician-legislator, I deeply enjoyed being able to pursue constituent-facing, legislative affairs based work this summer.

The latter project was one I designed and undertook in collaboration with the other COS fellow, Nkechi Okwu-Lawrence. For this project, we focused on exploring health literacy as an HPC health equity consideration, and interviewed various teams and investment program leads at the agency to gain insight into how health literacy considerations are relevant to their work. Our overall goal was to better understand how the HPC can ensure that MA patients have the ability to best receive, understand, and apply health care information in order to make the most informed health decision they can. I am specifically interested in patient populations who either don't speak English or have low English proficiency (LEP), and was able to explore how current HPC work can better support these patient communities. Based on our interviews and related research, we were able to put together general health literacy related recommendations for HPC to pursue in the future, which we presented to the agency at the end of the summer.

Working at the HPC has left me feeling invigorated about the power of state government, and further inspired to pursue a career in state and local government one day as a physician and public servant. My fellowship experience was made amazing in no small part due to the incredible and passionate community of staff at the HPC who spared no opportunity to make sure the fellows have a fulfilling summer despite the social limitations posed by COVID-19. Thank you to everyone at the HPC and Team Chief who have made this summer one for the books!



NORA EMMOTT
UNC Gillings School
of Global Public
Health

NORA EMMOTT

HCTI

The Health Policy Commission's summer fellowship provided a window into understanding the role of state government in improving health care and supporting health equity for all Massachusetts residents. I feel incredibly lucky to have been given the opportunity to work with the Health Care Transformation and Innovation (HCTI) department on the Moving Massachusetts Upstream: MassUP program this summer. The MassUP investment program is newly enacted and aims to impact upstream causes of poor health inequities, and it can be challenging to convey key program concepts to different Massachusetts audiences. To help the HPC best communicate to a wide audience about MassUP, I conducted a literature review for six key concepts of the program: Health Equity, Social Determinants of Health, Partnerships (between community organizations and health care institutions), Upstream Health, Food Systems and Security, and Economic Mobility and Stability. Upon synthesizing my literature review findings, I developed recommendations on messaging improvements for MassUP key concepts that will inform future learning and dissemination strategies. Additionally, I created 2 sets of interview guides for each MassUP partnership to inform partnership evaluation and to highlight the program for future learning and dissemination outputs. This summer, I greatly valued the opportunity to have ownership and autonomy over my projects and it is rewarding that my work will be used to inform future program learning and dissemination outputs.

As a Master of Public Health student, this fellowship has been an invaluable learning opportunity that has motivated me to pursue a career in health policy. The HPC created such a supportive, encouraging, and open virtual environment for fellows this summer. The HCTI team and my supervisor were incredibly supportive of my projects and set me up for success in the next phase of my career. I am deeply grateful for this opportunity and I look forward to seeing what the HPC does next!



NABA HUSAIN
Boston University
School of Public
Health

NABA HUSAIN

HCTI

As someone who is deeply committed to health equity, particularly in securing access to equitable, meaningful, and quality health care for marginalized populations, I have thoroughly enjoyed my time as a fellow at HPC.

This summer, I had the opportunity to work on a variety of learning and dissemination outputs through the Health Care Transformation and Innovation (HCTI) department. I spent a majority of my time working on four main projects. The first project involved brainstorming and pitching a proposal for potential outputs to celebrate the HPC's 10-year anniversary. This required me to think about what the purpose and goal of this might be, who the target audiences are, and what the potential outputs would need to look like. The second project I spent some time on was drafting a narrative for a datapoints for the Quality Measure Alignment Taskforce with the purpose of promoting transparency on payer adherence to the Massachusetts Aligned Measure set in their risk-based contracts. The last two projects involved beginning to draft a policy output and case study about Medication for Addiction Treatment (MAT) for Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) in different capacities. For the policy output, I spent time analyzing some qualitative and quantitative data on nine hospital awardees from HPC's SHIFT-Care investment program, conducting research, writing a literature review, and compiling key information from all of this to be used in the eventual output. In contrast to the policy output, I was able to focus in on one hospital awardee's work by conducting an interview with a hospital administrator and then beginning to build a draft for the case study itself. By working on these different types of outputs, I've been able to learn a lot about different thought processes as well as delve deeper into specific health topics, like MAT for OUD, that are extremely relevant in the Massachusetts health landscape.

I am grateful to have been able to play a role in shaping these outputs and learn so much in the process. The HCTI team is clearly very knowledgeable and talented and I'm thankful for their kindness and willingness to act as a resource for me over the course of the summer. I will take what I've learned from this experience forward with me as I continue to think about how I can best support health equity endeavors in my last semester in my master's program as well as back into the working world soon afterwards. Many thanks to everyone at the HPC for making this experience well worth it.



HARRY KOOS
Stanford University

HARRY KOOS

MOAT

As a Master's student studying Management Science & Engineering with a focus on Health Systems Modeling, I love working with data to better understand complex issues regarding the organization and delivery of health care. Working with the Market Oversight & Transparency (MOAT) department at the Massachusetts Health Policy Commission this summer turned out to be the perfect place for me to practice my skills and further my interest in this field.

During my fellowship I worked with the MOAT team to study the potential impacts of ambulatory expansions by large health systems. My first analysis considered whether ambulatory sites influence the likelihood that patients in a given area get care at hospitals of the same health system. In my second analysis, I used data from the Center for Health Information and Analysis (CHIA) to model how overall spending could change if patients moved between primary care physicians of different provider groups. Thirdly, I used social determinants of health data from the Agency for Health Research and Quality (AHRQ) to visualize how populations differ across the state of Massachusetts to help assess how locations of new ambulatory expansion sites align with the identified needs of communities. I also conducted literature reviews on how ambulatory surgery centers (ASCs) impact outpatient care utilization and prices, as well as the interaction of supply and demand in medical imaging.

Through my work this summer, I got to observe first-hand how academic research can influence how we think about and analyze contemporary health policy questions at the government level. Likewise, I also now better understand how public policy issues can make apparent what research is needed from academia. These lessons, among others I gained this summer, will be invaluable as I pursue additional higher education in the fields of health policy and health economics.

I knew the HPC was renowned for its ground-breaking work on health policy issues, and now I know that it is also an awesome community of intelligent and compassionate individuals, driven to improve the lives of those living in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Thank you to everyone at the HPC for making this such a great learning experience and inspiring me to continue pursuing this work!

ANGELA LIU

RCT



ANGELA LIU
Johns Hopkins
Bloomberg School of
Public Health

As a summer fellow at the Massachusetts Health Policy Commission (HPC), I had the great privilege of working with the Research and Cost Trends (RCT) team. Under an incredible mentor (and surrounded by the most supportive team), I gained first-hand knowledge about how health data can be leveraged to answer innovative and pressing research questions, while incorporating health equity in all aspects of work.

For my primary project, I had the opportunity to work with a number of different datasets. Using the Massachusetts All Payer Claims Database, the case-mix dataset (a census of hospital discharges), and U.S. Census data, I described the population of Massachusetts residents who interact with hospitals (Emergency Department and Inpatient settings). I then compared that population to the population captured by the All Payer Claims Database. Ultimately, this uncovered a better understanding of the general representativeness of the All Payer Claims Database, to help researchers understand the strengths and limitations of using that specific data source in their work. Much of my analyses were completed in STATA, but I also had the opportunity to create data visualizations in R.

In addition to my primary project, I also worked to create a health equity data inventory for HPC staff. I identified a number of public datasets, internal datasets, measures/composites, and visualization tools that include variables that may be potentially useful in health equity work.

Overall, my experience as a summer fellow at HPC was wonderful. My mentor and team were incredibly helpful and I am so grateful for their support throughout the process. The fellowship program was very well organized, with handfuls of opportunities to meet commissioners, members of the advisory boards, department leads, and alumni of the program.



**CAROLINE
MAGEE**

Yale School of
Public Health

CAROLINE MAGEE

HCTI

During my summer fellowship, I am grateful to have been able to work on three very different learning and dissemination projects with the Health Care Transformation and Innovation (HCTI) team. My first project was to highlight three investment program awardees' partnerships with local EMS providers, which required me to dig into the awardees' program reports and understand how their EMS partnerships fit into their larger program models. My second project synthesized quantitative and qualitative data reports on the nine programs in the SHIFT-Care opioid use disorder track to create an impact brief communicating the programs' outcomes and impacts. Finally, I had the opportunity to lead a case study of a pediatric behavioral telehealth program, developing an interview guide, conducting the interview, and drafting a narrative showcasing the interview participant's perspective on the program and lessons learned.

My summer projects taught me how public health program evaluation can be applied to influence public health practice and policy. I learned a lot about public health communication: how to think through selecting different writing styles and data presentation methods according to the desired message and audience, and then put those different approaches into practice. The fellowship—informational sessions orienting fellows to the HPC and different departments' work, meetings with individual board and advisory council members, observing HPC board meetings—gave me insight into how policy informs public health practice, and how public health professionals and research inform policy.

As I reflect on the summer, the welcoming community at the HPC stands out. From HCTI team meetings to walk-and-talks with staff from other departments, HPC staff have been uniformly generous with their time, excited to meet and support the fellows, and eager to share their knowledge and career insights. I am truly grateful to everyone at the HPC and particularly the HCTI team for their mentorship and support, and for making this fellowship an educational, challenging, and fun experience.



**NKECHI
OKWU-LAWRENCE**

Emory Rollins School
of Public Health

NKECHI OKWU-LAWRENCE

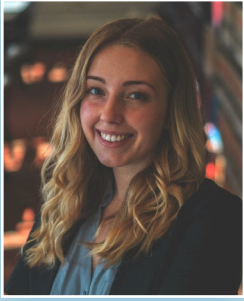
COS

As a Master of Public Health candidate with a concentration in Healthcare Management, it is imperative that I understand how health policy affects health care delivery in the U.S. Working with the Massachusetts Health Policy Commission this summer provided me with practical policy and leadership knowledge that will guide me in making meaningful health care impacts!

This summer, I had the pleasure of being a fellow in the Office of the Chief of Staff (COS). As a fellow on this team, I learned what it looks like to communicate effectively and transparently with and on behalf of an organization. I also got the chance to exercise skills in multi-tasking, flexibility, and autonomy.

One of my main projects was conducting research on suitable language surrounding weight, mental health, substance use, and rural populations to add to HPC's Health Equity Style Guide. These additions make for a more comprehensive and inclusive style guide that HPC staff can utilize as they work towards influencing health care on their respective teams. I also designed and performed a collaborative project with another fellow, Akshayaa Chittibabu, that explored the intersection of health literacy and current/future HPC work. The internal interviews we conducted for this project exhibited HPC's enthusiasm for lessening health literacy as a health care burden for all Massachusetts patients. In addition, I got the chance to help organize publications and presentations on HPC's website, which was great visual exposure to the work that HPC has done for years as an agency.

Even in the virtual environment, I absorbed a great deal of knowledge from well-rounded HPC staff that has truly inspired me as I progress in my public health career. Thank you to the COS team for your support and everyone at HPC involved in making this a wonderful summer fellowship experience!



**ANNIKA
SKANSBERG**

Northeastern
University School
of Law

Johns Hopkins
Bloomberg School of
Public Health

ANNIKA SKANSBERG

OGC

As a dual degree Juris Doctor and Master of Public Health candidate, my time as a fellow at the Health Policy Commission was an invaluable experience that allowed me to utilize the knowledge I have gained through both my legal and public health courses and work directly on impactful health policy issues. This summer has expanded my knowledge and understanding of the Massachusetts health care system and current policies working to improve health care in Massachusetts.

It has been a privilege to work with the Office of the General Counsel, where I had the opportunity to work on a range of legal work including research on out-of-network billing legislation at the federal and state level and preemption issues related to this legislation. I also had the chance to observe and read stakeholder feedback from providers, insurers, and consumer advocacy groups as part of this new out-of-network billing legislation. Finally, I had the chance to work with the Office of Patient Protection (OPP) on a project translating the new out-of-network billing legislation and Division of Insurance (DOI) bulletins for consumers. While working on these projects, I was able to improve my legal research and writing skills, work on interpreting and summarizing legislation, and gain insight into different perspectives regarding the health care system.

In addition to the legal projects that I worked on, I was able to learn more about current Massachusetts' health policy by attending Board and Advisory Council meetings and participating in meetings with commissioners. I was also able to connect with HPC staff outside of the legal team to discuss some of my interests in drug policy and policy to address the opioid epidemic.

My time at the HPC has been an incredible learning experience and I am grateful for having the opportunity to work with and learn from all the amazing staff at the HPC. Thank you to the legal team, the entire HPC staff, and the other fellows for all the support, mentorship, and creating such a welcoming environment (even through Zoom)!

**MASSACHUSETTS HEALTH
POLICY COMMISSION**

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