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Massachusetts maintained record low levels of uninsured and improved access to needed health care during economic downturn

BOSTON — The rate of uninsured, working-age adults in Massachusetts has remained at record low levels despite high unemployment and a severe economic downturn. Four years after the state began implementing its groundbreaking health care reform law, gains in residents' access to needed care have also been maintained, and racial and ethnic disparities in coverage have been eliminated. Furthermore, 67 percent of working-aged adults support health reform, which is virtually the same level of public support found shortly after the law was enacted.

These are among the findings from the latest Massachusetts Health Reform Survey, which has tracked the impact of reform since fall 2006. The survey, commissioned by the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation and conducted by the Urban Institute, is the basis for a report, [Health Reform in Massachusetts: An Update As Of Fall 2009](#), and an accompanying [chartbook](#). Also released today was a related [article](#) by Urban Institute researchers published in the journal *Health Affairs*.

"This comprehensive assessment of Massachusetts health reform shows that the law has accomplished most of its key goals and while there are still opportunities to improve our health care system, reform has vastly improved people's ability to get needed care and coverage," said Sarah Iselin, the Foundation's president.

Highlights of the report include:

- The rate of uninsured residents remained at historic lows despite the economic recession. Only 4.8 percent of working-aged adults in Massachusetts were uninsured at the time of the survey in fall 2009.
- The majority of Massachusetts residents continued to obtain insurance coverage through their employers and there is no evidence of employers or workers dropping coverage because of the availability of public coverage (commonly called "crowd-out").
- Access to and use of needed health care improved between 2006 and 2009, with more adults reporting visits to doctors and other providers, including visits for preventive care, and fewer adults reporting an unmet need for care in 2009.
- Health reform has effectively eliminated racial and ethnic disparities in insurance coverage and minority adults also gained ground in access to affordable health care and their ability to have their medical needs met.
- Two-thirds (67.0 percent) of the state's adults aged 18-64 support Massachusetts health reform, consistent with the level of support in fall 2006.
- Some barriers that existed prior to health reform persist. One in five adults reported they did not receive some needed medical care and about one in five adults reported problems paying medical bills in 2009.

"The success of Massachusetts in sustaining its health reforms despite the challenges posed by the economic recession provide important lessons for implementing health reform nationally," said the Urban Institute's Sharon Long.

"Massachusetts has shown that, while difficult, sustaining the gains of health reform in a severe recession is possible."

About the Massachusetts Health Reform Survey

In April 2006, Massachusetts enacted a health reform law that sought to move the state to near universal insurance coverage. In order to track the effects of the law, the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation began funding an annual survey of residents, aged 18 to 64, starting in the fall of 2006, just prior to the implementation of key elements of reform. The Massachusetts Health Reform Survey (MHRS) has been fielded in the fall of each subsequent year by the Urban Institute, and has been the basis for more than a dozen studies and reports.

About the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation:

The mission of the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation is to expand access to health care. It focuses on collaborating with public and private stakeholders to develop measurable and sustainable solutions that benefit uninsured, vulnerable, and low-income individuals and families in the Commonwealth. The Foundation was formed in 2001 with an initial endowment from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts. It operates separately from the company and is governed by its own Board of Directors.

About the Urban Institute:

The Urban Institute is a Washington D.C.-based non-profit, nonpartisan policy research organization. It gathers data, conducts research, evaluates programs, offers technical assistance overseas, and educates Americans on social and economic issues, to foster sound public policy and effective government.

About *Health Affairs*:

Health Affairs is the leading journal of health policy thought and research. The peer-reviewed journal was founded in 1981 under the aegis of Project HOPE, a nonprofit international health education organization. *Health Affairs* explores health policy issues of current concern in both domestic and international spheres.