

# Public Health

A Metropolitan Area Planning Council Legislative Priority

The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) serves as the Regional Planning Agency for the people who live and work in the 101 cities and towns in the Metropolitan Boston region, which includes roughly half the state's population and two-thirds of the state's jobs.

MAPC was deeply involved in the development of the Massachusetts Local Food Action Plan, which was adopted in December 2015. Looking ahead to this legislative session, we want to support those legislative priorities that will help to facilitate access to healthy foods, particularly for underserved communities and make other advancements in public health for all of the people of the Commonwealth.

S.1293  
H.2012

## Prevention and Wellness Trust Fund (PWTF)

### **"An Act to promote public health through the prevention and wellness trust fund"**

Sponsors: Senators Jason Lewis, Harriette Chandler, & James Welch, Representatives Aaron Vega & Tackey Chan

In 2012, PWTF received \$60 million over four years through an assessment on health insurers and large hospital systems to extend care into communities through clinical-community linkages. While funding ran out last session, this legislation reinstates the trust fund to reinvest in four critical public health areas: pediatric asthma, hypertension, tobacco use, and falls among older adults. This bill funds PWTF through a combination of marijuana revenue and a modest assessment on health insurers.

S.267  
H.591

## Breakfast After the Bell

### **"An Act regarding breakfast after the bell"**

Sponsors: Senator Sal DiDomenico, Representatives Aaron Vega & Andres Vargas

One of eight children in Massachusetts are food insecure, meaning they experience a food shortage in their home. Massachusetts' high-poverty schools are already required to serve breakfast, but it is traditionally served before the start of the school day. The stigma of the breakfast program being for 'poor kids' and the logistical challenges of getting to school early keep students from participating in before-the-bell breakfast programs. The proposed bill would require that high poverty schools serve breakfast at the beginning of the instructional day, increasing access to school breakfast for nearly 150,000 Massachusetts students.

S.48  
H.145

## Healthy Incentives Program

### **"An Act relative to an agricultural healthy incentives program"**

Sponsors: Senator Anne Gobi & Representative Paul Mark

The Healthy Incentives Program doubles SNAP recipients' purchases of fresh fruits and vegetables directly from farmers, improving health outcomes for low-income communities and increasing sales for local farms. This bill will establish the framework for the program's long-term sustainability.

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S.678  
H.1173

## Addressing the SNAP Gap

**“An Act improving public health through a common application for core food, health and safety-net programs”**

Sponsors: Senator Sal DiDomenico & Representative Jay Livingstone

This bill establishes a common application for individuals who receive state benefits. The bill addresses the fact that an estimated 740,000 people who are receiving MassHealth are likely also eligible for the SNAP program, but are not enrolled. It would allow those individuals who are eligible to simultaneously apply for income support and benefit programs when the individual applies for or renews MassHealth coverage or any other single state application or renewal process.

S.257  
H.587

## School Lunch Debt

**“An Act to expand access to school meals”**

Sponsors: Senator Cynthia Stone Creem & Representative Andres Vargas

Meal-shaming, the practice of publicly embarrassing school children with outstanding lunch debt, still exists in Massachusetts today. This legislation would end this practice, and urge school districts and parents to resolve outstanding lunch debt without involving the student.

## Other Priorities

### Sugary Beverage Tax

**S.1709 / H.2529 - “An Act to promote healthy alternatives to sugary drinks”**

Sponsors: Senator Jason Lewis and Representatives Kay Khan & Jon Santiago

Too many residents – adults and children alike – in Massachusetts are suffering from preventable chronic diseases such as Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, cancer and tooth decay. This bill proposes a tiered excise tax on sugary beverages with rates based on the amount of sugar content.

### Opioids

MAPC was supportive of the CARE Act in the most recent legislative session, which became law and provided additional resources to communities to combat the opioid epidemic. However, municipalities and health officials are continuing to discuss innovative ways to improve their response, recovery and prevention efforts. MAPC will continue to work with municipal public health officials to push for meaningful investments at the state level to provide them with the tools needed to address this public health issue.

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