

health law **advocates**
Lawyers Fighting for Health Care Justice

HLA

The Impact of COVID-19 on HLA's Clients and Our Organization
2020

The pandemic is causing a mental health crisis, especially among youth

“We can expect an increase in children’s behavioral and mental health issues as well as lower academic performance—all of which could last well beyond this pandemic.”

- The most at risk are the children HLA serves -- children who previously experienced racial, ethnic, and income disparities, that are compounded by pandemic-related trauma.
- “Our Current Behavioral Health System Cannot Adequately Meet the Needs of Children During This Crisis”
- **HLA’s Mental Health Advocacy Program for Kids has a key a role in protecting children during and after COVID-19, but state funding for MHAP for Kids is at risk because of the economic and state budget crisis.**



Source: Protecting our Children’s Well-Being During Covid-19: Recommendations for Supporting Children and Families Who Have Experienced Trauma and Stress During the Pandemic A Report of the Childhood Trauma Task Force, JUNE 2020, <https://www.mass.gov/doc/cttf-june-2020-report-protecting-our-childrens-well-being-during-covid-19/download>



Residents with the lowest income have been hit the hardest financially

- Amid the pandemic, “38% of people in the state are now food insecure.”
- This makes it harder for residents to afford health care at the worst time, when so many of the same people have the highest risk of becoming infected with COVID-19.
 - 25% of HLA cases since March 1st, involve a client with a medical bill they can't afford.
- Now, when HLA represents a client with unaffordable medical debt, we are often not only fighting for their ability to afford health care, but also to feed their family.
- HLA is also fighting to protect our clients from having to choose between paying for health care, food, or housing, by submitting legal arguments in court defending the state's temporary ban on evictions.



Source: boston.com; Caption: “MEMA and the National Guard brought hundreds of boxes of food to Chelsea on April 16, 2020.” —Photo by Joseph Prezioso / AFP

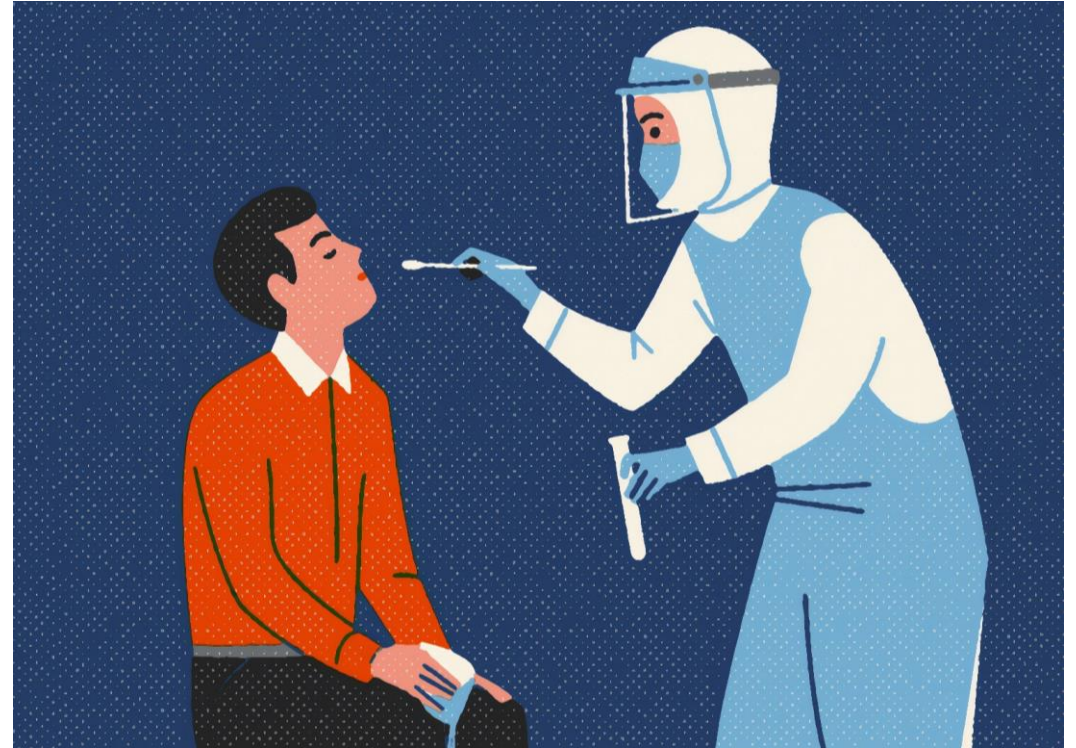
Immigrants are at greater risk of contracting COVID-19

- Immigrants in Massachusetts are among those most negatively impacted by the pandemic.
 - They are at greater risk of contracting COVID-19 due to employment and housing.
 - Due to recent federal policies, they also face the steepest, and increasing, barriers to health care at a time many need it the most.
- HLA launched our Medical-Legal Partnership for Immigrants in July to increase resources dedicated to helping immigrants overcome health care barriers during the pandemic and after.



Fighting bias in allocation of lifesaving care

- States have a duty to provide guidelines to health care providers on rationing lifesaving health care, such as ventilators, if demand exceeds supply during a pandemic.
- When Massachusetts state officials issued such guidelines early in the pandemic, HLA and others successfully advocated for changes to the guidelines to address discrimination that would have systematically allocated lifesaving health care away from people with disabilities and persons of color.



- We continue to advocate for further policy changes to ensure equity in a second COVID surge or future pandemic.

HLA

HLA will advocate aggressively to protect coverage for consumers

- Though our state has a high rate of health insurance coverage, some with low-income never have coverage and many are uncovered at times.
- The lack of coverage for some poses not just a severe threat to those without health insurance and thus access to care, but to all, in the COVID-19 era.
- HLA has worked extensively with state officials to develop new policies to improve benefits (e.g. tele-health and no-cost COVID-19 testing) and to provide coverage for as many as possible.



- Going forward, as emergency federal funds for MassHealth ebb, HLA will advocate aggressively for health coverage and access.