



Senator Augustine and Members of the Committee,

The Maryland Public Health Association (MdPHA) strongly supports **SB0684 – Maryland Health Equity Dashboard**, and we commend Senator Malcolm Augustine for championing this critical public health initiative. Access to timely, transparent, and comprehensive health data is essential for advancing health equity, identifying disparities, and informing effective policy decisions.

The Imperative for a Maryland Health Equity Dashboard

Maryland continues to face persistent health disparities that disproportionately affect racial and ethnic minorities, low-income communities, and rural populations. For instance, in 2020, the infant mortality rate for Non-Hispanic Blacks in Maryland was 9.9 per 1,000 live births, compared to 3.3 for Non-Hispanic Whites.¹

A centralized, publicly accessible Health Equity Dashboard would enable policymakers, researchers, and community members to track key health indicators, monitor progress, and implement targeted interventions where they are needed most. Currently, fragmented and inconsistent data collection practices hinder the ability to make informed, equity-focused health policy decisions. A statewide, regularly updated dashboard will enhance transparency and empower stakeholders with real-time data to address social determinants of health and improve community well-being.

Evidence Supporting Health Equity Dashboards

Health equity dashboards have been successfully implemented in other regions, demonstrating their potential impact in improving health outcomes. For example:

- *Missouri's Health Equity Dashboards* offer detailed depictions of differences in health outcomes and factors across various populations and geographies, guiding targeted quality-improvement efforts.²

¹ <https://mchb.tvisdata.hrsa.gov/Narratives/Overview/5f6bf77b-2287-4416-9871-38c1d74644fd>

² <https://web.mhanet.com/health-equity-dashboards/>



- *Deloitte's Health Equity Dashboard* provides critical insights into health equity across the United States, clarifying how risks for certain health conditions vary across intersections of race, geography, and age.³

Studies have shown that accessible, data-driven health equity tools can:

- *Improve early detection and intervention:* Dashboards can highlight essential disparities in clinical outcomes, guiding targeted quality-improvement efforts and ultimately improving health equity.⁴
- *Address racial and economic disparities:* By visualizing data, dashboards can highlight disparities in clinical outcomes, guiding targeted quality-improvement efforts.⁴
- *Enhance public engagement:* Community organizations and advocates rely on publicly available data to advocate for policy changes that address health inequities. Without a centralized and regularly updated dashboard, this process remains inefficient and inequitable.

Disease-Specific Examples of Health Disparities in Maryland

Cardiovascular Disease: Heart disease remains a leading cause of death in Maryland, with significant disparities observed among different populations.⁵

Diabetes: Diabetes prevalence and complications are notably higher in certain communities within Maryland, underscoring the need for targeted interventions.⁵

Hypertension: Hypertension contributes significantly to health disparities in Maryland, particularly among African American populations.⁵

HIV/AIDS: The rate of new HIV cases is four times higher in certain populations compared to others in Maryland, highlighting a critical area for focused public health efforts.⁶

Infant Mortality: Significant disparities exist in infant mortality rates across different racial and ethnic groups in Maryland, indicating a pressing need for targeted health interventions.⁷

³ <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/pages/life-sciences-and-health-care/articles/free-public-health-equity-data.html>

⁴ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10639125/>

⁵ <https://www.medschool.umaryland.edu/mahec/health-disparities/the-burden-of-chronic-disease-in-maryland/>

⁶ <https://www.aha.org/case-studies/2012-06-01-sense-urgency-addressing-health-disparities-maryland/>

⁷ <https://mchb.tvisdata.hrsa.gov/Narratives/Overview/5f6bf77b-2287-4416-9871-38c1d74644fd>



Potential Public Health Benefits of SB0684

- *Better Allocation of Resources:* Data-driven decision-making ensures that resources are directed toward communities most in need, maximizing the impact of state health initiatives.
- *Strengthening Community Trust:* Transparency in health data reporting fosters public trust in health institutions and government agencies.
- *Empowering Local Health Departments & Researchers:* Standardized, up-to-date data allows health departments and researchers to track trends in health disparities, develop targeted interventions, and measure the effectiveness of policy changes over time.

Conclusion

If we are truly committed to eliminating health disparities and ensuring that every Marylander has a fair and just opportunity to be healthy, we must equip ourselves with the right tools to measure, track, and act on health inequities in real time. The Maryland Health Equity Dashboard is not just about numbers, it is about lives, about communities, and about ensuring that no one is left behind because we failed to see the warning signs in the data.

With this legislation, Maryland has an opportunity to set a national precedent by prioritizing transparency, accountability, and evidence-based decision-making in public health. Without comprehensive data, disparities remain hidden; without visibility, there can be no targeted action; and without action, health inequities will persist for generations.

We strongly urge the committee to support and advance SB0684 as a critical step toward a healthier, more equitable Maryland.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Dr. Hanna Idriess

President, Maryland Public Health Association