



St. Louis Regional Health Commission

Achieving zero health disparities through community and systems partnerships, yielding health equity in all policy and outcomes

2023 Legislative Wrap-Up Report

The Missouri Legislature ended its 2023 session on May 12th. We are pleased to report that our state will now join others in expanding Medicaid coverage for birthing people from 60 days to one year postpartum. However, the very same legislature is also following the trend of conservative states who are passing harmful legislation to the LGBTQIA+ community. While we celebrate the steps taken by our legislature to eliminate health disparities for some communities, we must remain vigilant in our efforts to strive for all communities to achieve health equity in our state. Read the RHC's Legislative Wrap-Up to learn more about what happened this session that we consider wins and losses and how you can join us in taking action to promote positive health outcomes in our state.



**SESSION
SNAPSHOT**

2,251

pieces of legislation filed in both chambers

59

bills voted through by the General Assembly and sent to Governor Parson for signature

\$49b

Fiscal Year 2024 Missouri state budget approved by the General Assembly

What happened in the 2023 Missouri Legislative session?

The RHC reports on the outcomes from our legislative priorities; this list is not exhaustive of all legislative results from the 2023 session. Note that most pieces of legislation that we report on have been passed by the legislature, but await signature by the Governor to become law.



WINS



Postpartum care

SB 106 and SB 45/90 extend postpartum healthcare coverage for birthing people enrolled in MO HealthNet for the duration of and one year following pregnancy. If signed by the Governor, benefits will begin immediately.



Healthcare workforce

SB 157 and SB 70 expand the scope of practice for advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs). This will expand the workforce supply to meet the demand for health care utilization across the state, especially in the health care safety net.



Health equity

Efforts to add anti-diversity, equity, and inclusion language to the Fiscal Year 2024 state budget and establish a Parents' Bill of Rights (SB 4) to increase parental control over educational curriculum fail. Both issues will likely come up again in the 2024 legislative session.



Initiative Petition Reform

HJR 43 would have increased the threshold for Constitutional ballot measures to pass from 50% to 60% of voters. The measure came close to passing, but the Senate did not pass it in the end. It will likely be brought back again in 2024, ahead of attempts to protect abortion access through the ballot.



LOSSES



Gender-affirming care

SB 49 bans gender affirming care for transgender minors and some adults and SB 39 forces transgender high school athletes to play on teams corresponding to their gender assigned at birth. Both were passed by the legislature and signed into law by Governor Parson on June 7.



WIN: Postpartum Coverage Expansion Passes this Session



INCREASED ACCESS TO CARE WILL ADDRESS HEALTH DISPARITIES

The RHC supports legislation that modifies provisions relating to MO HealthNet (Missouri Medicaid) services for pregnant and postpartum people. This legislation would begin to address health disparities in maternal child health. Maternal and infant mortality rates in Missouri are consistently one of the highest in the nation, and people of color are at increased risk for poor maternal and infant health outcomes compared to their White peers. Missouri's maternal mortality rate is especially dire for Black women, who are three to four times more likely than white women to die within a year of pregnancy. However, those who receive MO HealthNet for Pregnant Women in Missouri lose coverage after just 60 days. In order to prevent poor health outcomes for this population, it is essential to extend Medicaid coverage to at least one year postpartum.

In the 2023 session, several bills were introduced that would extend postpartum Medicaid coverage from 60 days to one year after delivery. Fortunately, legislation to extend postpartum coverage passed in two in separate bills, [SB 106](#) on May 5th and [SB 45/90](#) on May 12th. If signed into law, both bills would provide MO HealthNet coverage for birthing people receiving benefits through MO HealthNet for Pregnant Women or Show Me Healthy Babies. This coverage will include full Medicaid benefits for the duration of the pregnancy and for one year following the end of the pregnancy. The legislation contained an emergency clause which means that benefits shall begin immediately, once these bills are signed into law by Governor Parsons. The RHC applauds the legislature for prioritizing health equity for birthing people.



WIN: APRN Practice Expansion Crosses the Finish Line



INCREASED HEALTHCARE WORKFORCE WILL IMPROVE ACCESS TO CARE

The Legislature passed several bills that, if signed into law, would expand the scope of practice for advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs). The RHC strongly supports authorizing health care providers to safely practice at the top of their license in order to meet the demand for health care utilization in Missouri, especially in the health care safety net, but want to ensure quality care and patient safety. This legislation would increase access to health care in communities across the state.

[SB 157](#) and [SB 70](#) both passed on the final day of session and would allow an APRN to prescribe Schedule II controlled substances for hospice patients. Additionally, collaborative practice arrangements between the APRN and the collaborating physician may waive geographic proximity requirements, including when the arrangement outlines the use of telehealth and when the APRN is providing services in a correctional center. Collaborating physicians or designated physicians shall be present with the APRN for sufficient periods of time, at least once every two weeks, to participate in chart reviews and supervision. Currently, an APRN shall practice with the collaborating physician continuously present for a one-month period when entering into an arrangement with the physician. This legislation also waives that requirement when a primary care or behavioral health physician enters into an arrangement with a primary care or behavioral health APRN, the physician is new to the patient population, and the APRN is familiar with the patient population. Currently, a nurse may be licensed to practice professional or practical nursing. This act adds a license to practice advanced practice nursing and modifies the definitions of APRN and the practice of professional nursing.



LOSS: Harmful Ban on Gender-Affirming Care for Minors Signed by the Governor



BARRIERS TO HEALTHCARE WILL EXACERBATE HEALTH DISPARITIES AND PREVENT HEALTH EQUITY

The RHC opposes anti-transgender bills that would ban age appropriate, medically necessary care for transgender youth under the age of 18 as well as prevent MO HealthNet from covering gender-affirming care for participants regardless of their age. Although the RHC is not an expert on this complex issue, these bills would not adequately address health disparities and would prevent health equity for the LGBTQIA+ community, which are 2 of our priority advocacy areas. It would also impede our state's public health ability to make decisions about care for any population.

Unfortunately, the legislature passed two anti-transgender bills this session. [SB 49](#) passed on May 10th and bans gender-affirming care for transgender minors, people of all ages on MO HealthNet, and incarcerated persons. The law is set to take into effect on August 28, 2023 and remain in place until August 2027. Young people already receiving gender-affirming care including medication and healthcare services before Aug 28, 2023 will be able to continue accessing the same category of services until at least Aug 28, 2027.

Another anti-transgender bill also passed the legislature this session: [SB 39](#) forces transgender high school and postsecondary (college, university, and trade school) athletes to play on teams that correspond to their gender assigned at birth and is also set to take into effect on August 28, 2023.

Governor Parson signed both bills into law on June 7. The Governor issued a press release on the passage of these bills [accessible here](#). The ACLU of Missouri issued [this statement](#) in response outlining the detrimental effects these pieces of legislation will have on young people across our state.

The RHC is concerned about how this trend of anti-transgender laws will impact on the overall physical, mental and social well-being of transgender and gender non-conforming Missourians of all ages.



LEGISLATION THAT RESTRICTS DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION DAMPEN EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE HEALTH EQUITY



WIN, FOR NOW: Anti-diversity, Equity and Inclusion Language (DEI) Not Included in the State Budget this Year

In March, the Missouri House added anti-diversity language to the Fiscal Year 2024 State Budget that would have wide-ranging consequences. The language is very broad, potentially impacting a huge variety of services and programs that the state provides. It reads:

No funds shall be expended for staffing, vendors, consultants, or programs associated with “Diversity, Equity, Inclusion,” or “Diversity, Inclusion, Belonging,” or any other initiative which similarly promotes: 1) the preferential treatment of any individual or group of individuals based upon race, color, religion, sex, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, national origin, or ancestry; 2) the concept that disparities are necessarily tied to oppression; 3) collective guilt ideologies; 4) intersectional or divisive identity activism; or, 5) the limiting of freedom of conscience, thought, or speech. This does not prohibit the department from following federal and state employment and anti-discrimination laws.

This language is deeply problematic, and the RHC opposes any efforts that would put language threatening diversity, equity and inclusion into law. In response to these concerns, over 214 organizations statewide, including the RHC, signed a letter in opposition to the anti-DEI language in the state budget. This was shared with the Senators on the Appropriations Committee.

Once the House passed budget bills moved over to the Senate, the Appropriations Committee removed the anti-DEI language that had been added by the House. Although this issue was debated for hours on the Senate floor, the final budget that passed on May 5th did not include the anti-DEI language. However, this is something that will very likely come up again next session.



WIN, FOR NOW: Leadership Priority to Establish the Parents' Bill of Rights Act of 2023 Falls Short

The RHC opposes bills that establish a Parents' Bill of Rights. This legislation would increase parental control over educational curriculum. The legislation specifically targets instruction, professional development and programs related to diversity, equity and inclusion as well as social emotional learning. The bill specifically would have banned K-12 public schools from teaching that “individuals of any race, ethnicity, color, or national origin are inherently superior or inferior.” It would have prohibited curriculum that could make students feel “responsible for actions committed in the past by others.” In addition to our concern about the quality of education and equity in representation, it also seems to be a massive and unproductive headache for educators needing to upload and give parents access to curriculum and teaching lessons that would be very harmful to education. Although this legislation was a priority of leadership, [SB 4](#), which would have established a Parents' Bill of Rights, only passed the Senate this year and therefore will not become law. The RHC is concerned about future attacks by the legislature towards diversity, equity and inclusion and the impact it will have on the health and well-being of Missourians.



WIN, FOR NOW: Initiative Petition Reform Does Not Pass this Session but Remains a Legislative Priority



CHANGES TO THE INITIATIVE PETITION PROCESS WILL HINDER POSITIVE POLICY CHANGE

[HJR 43](#) would make it harder to advance policy change through the initiative petition process. The RHC opposes this bill because this process is a critical avenue to advance policy change and address social determinants of health.

Currently, any Constitutional measure that is put on the ballot, either by initiative petition or by the General Assembly, must receive a simple majority of votes cast (50%) to pass. [HJR 43](#) would increase this threshold and require approval from 60% of voters in order for measures placed on the ballot to pass, making it harder for the state's populace to enact changes through the ballot.

Additionally, [HJR 43](#) would require that summaries of bills for consideration which are visible on the ballot include language stating that voters must be citizens of the United States and registered Missouri voters in order to vote; however, these are already the existing voting requirements in Missouri. This added language would have the potential of confusing voters about the true purpose of the proposed amendments which they see on their ballot, encouraging them to pass the amendment because they seem like rules that should be in place.

[HJR 43](#) passed the House and the Senate after a 5-hour filibuster by Democrats. This legislation moved to a conference committee where the differences between the House and Senate version of the legislation were reconciled. Fortunately, only the House passed this negotiated version of the bill but it was not taken up by the Senate. This issue is something to prepare to fight against next session. The Leadership in both legislative chambers are anxious to get IP reform passed before there is an opportunity to have protecting abortion access included as a ballot initiative in 2024. Several states have successfully passed ballot initiatives that protect abortion rights, including in our neighboring state of Kansas.



NOW WHAT: TAKE ACTION & MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

Now that the 2023 legislative session is over, it is a perfect time to let your elected officials hear from you about these important issues. The Governor has yet to take action on many of the passed pieces of legislation, and can still hear from you. Your state and federal Senators and Representatives work for *you*, their constituents, and you have the power to vote them in or out of office. It is important that they hear from people living in their district. You can make your voice heard by thanking them for voting "yes" on issues that matter to you or sharing your disappointment when they support issues that are harmful to the health and wellbeing of your community.

Contact your legislators: [click here](#) to find out who they are and how to contact them.

Register to vote: [click here to do so](#). 2024 federal, state-wide, and municipal elections are just around the corner. Help others in your life register too!

Join the fight: If you would like to take action with the RHC and learn more about our advocacy efforts, [click here to sign up](#).

GET IN TOUCH

Contact us [online](#) or by calling our team at 314.446.6454.



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