

# Department of Population and Quantitative Health Sciences

## Weekly Newsletter

MARCH 16-20, 2026



UMass Chan  
MEDICAL SCHOOL

**PRESS RELEASE from the governor with remarks by the chancellor – 2/24/2026**

**[New UMass Chan Evaluation: Innovation at MassHealth Led to Improved Health Outcomes and Lower Costs](#)**  
***Evaluation finds half a billion dollars in savings and improved physical and behavioral health outcomes for MassHealth members***

A study by researchers at UMass Chan Medical School, led by Matthew Alcusky (in PQHS) and Elaine Wang (in ForHealth Consulting), found that delivery system reforms implemented as part of the **MassHealth’s 2017–2022 Section 1115 Demonstration Waiver** saved **over \$500 million** in five years while improving health outcomes for members. The reforms helped maintain **near-universal health coverage, reduce overdose deaths, and reduce hospitalization rates.**

As the center of MassHealth’s reform efforts was a shift to an **Accountable Care Organization (ACO) model**, where providers are responsible for the health and costs of a defined population, with incentives to improve care quality and outcomes while managing costs. The ACO model included key programs **to address health-related social needs** (e.g., targeted nutrition programs and housing supports), and these programs were found to reduce rates of emergency department visits and hospitalizations.

Several Massachusetts leaders were quoted in the press release including the governor and UMass Chan Chancellor (copied below).

- “Massachusetts is home to the best health care system in the world, and MassHealth plays a critical role in that,” said **Governor Maura Healey**. “This report affirms that the reforms undertaken by MassHealth these past few years have led to lower costs and better coverage. I congratulate the team at MassHealth on this significant accomplishment, and we will keep working together to build on this progress.”
- “This study is a powerful illustration of how evidence-based research shapes health policy,” said **Michael F. Collins, Chancellor of UMass Chan**. “Our faculty is deeply committed to partnering with state leaders to improve quality of care and support the health of those who need it most.”

**Presentation of Medicaid Findings to Leadership at Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation**

A subcomponent of the Medicaid evaluation focused on the integration of home-delivered, medically tailored meals into patient care. On Feb 17th 2026, the Director of CMMI, Abe Sutton, and Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Susannah Bernheim, met in-person in Boston at Community Servings, a close partner of UMass Chan and non-profit organization that provides medically tailored meals through MassHealth. PQHS faculty member Kurt Hager presented findings on the cost-effectiveness of Medicaid-funded meal programs to CMMI, who stated the findings will directly guide the design of new nutrition models tested by the agency.

**Collaboration with other State Medicaid Evaluators in Policy Translation**

Finally, UMass Chan has been collaborating with other state Medicaid researchers to jointly promote findings across states. Kurt Hager coauthored a commentary recently published in JAMA Internal Medicine with Dr. Seth Berkowitz from UNC School of Medicine, who led the North Carolina Medicaid 1115 Demonstration evaluation. The article discusses the future of Medicaid-funded nutrition programs and outlined existing policy hurdles in scaling successful program models.

UPCOMING EVENTS



**Wednesday, March 18, 10:00 – 11:00 AM**

**Research Methods Meeting (announcing new presenter and talk)**

**Presenter:** Arlene Ash, PhD, Professor and Division Chief, Biostatistics and Health Information Systems, UMass Chan Medical School

**Title:** Helping Medicare Advantage Achieve Its Promise

**Abstract:** Medicare Advantage was designed to allow private health plans to deliver coordinated, efficient care for Medicare beneficiaries rather than reimbursing providers for each service delivered, as in traditional Medicare. Because plans receive a fixed amount per enrollee, accurate risk adjustment is essential to ensure adequate payment for beneficiaries with complex needs without overpaying for relatively healthy enrollees. Weaknesses in current risk-adjustment models contribute to substantial mispayments and distort plan incentives. Advances in diagnosis-based classification and modern predictive modeling now make it possible to significantly improve payment accuracy and help Medicare Advantage better achieve its original promise.

**Bio:** Since 2014, Dr. Ash is a pioneer in risk adjustment methods, and has led teams incorporating both medical and social risk into global payments and quality measures for MassHealth (Massachusetts Medicaid and Children’s Health Insurance Programs). She is keenly interested in understanding and addressing inequities associated with gender, age, race, and socioeconomics; also, quality, equity and efficiency in health care financing and delivery. Click [here](#) to join.



**Tuesday, March 31, 2:30 PM, PDC N1-1100 or Zoom**

**PhD Dissertation Defense**

**Presenter:** Gretchen K. Weaver, MPH

**Mentor:** Apurv Soni, MD, PhD

**Title:** Age, Telehealth, and COVID-19 Care: An Examination of Visit Type, Oral Antiviral Prescription, and Patient Preference

**Introduction:** Telehealth emerged as a healthcare innovation during the pandemic and is beneficial in the care of adults, especially older adults. Age may be related to technology use, and other areas of telehealth remain underexplored in the post pandemic era. This dissertation used an access-to-care lens and employed COVID-19 outpatient care as use case to assess three facets of telehealth. The specific aims examined the associations between 1) age group and visit type, 2) visit type and oral antiviral prescription, and 3) age group and care delivery preference for COVID-19 or flu.

Click [here](#) to join, password 221592

### KUDOS



[Hoa Nguyen, MD, MS, PhD](#) - Professor, Epidemiology, has been accepted into the Established Scholar program in CAPES Year 4 (2026–2027). She will work closely with Dr. Ed Boudreaux and begin working in the field of suicide prevention. Congratulations Hoa!

### DIVERSITY

**March 17** - St. Patrick’s Day commemorates Ireland’s patron saint and has evolved into a global celebration of Irish culture. Beyond parades and traditional symbols, the day invites reflection on themes of migration, resilience, cultural pride, and the importance of fostering inclusive communities that honor diverse cultural identities.



**March 20-21** - The Spring Equinox is celebrated in many cultures around the world.

Pagans and Wiccans celebrate Ostara by honoring fertility, rebirth, and the return of life’s vibrant energy. People have honored this sacred time by decorating altars with eggs, symbolic of fertility and new beginnings, and rabbits, representing abundance.

In Japan, the Vernal Equinox Day (Shunbun no Hi) is celebrated by enjoying the outdoors while admiring the blooming cherry blossom trees as a part of hanami celebrations. People also visit the burial sites of ancestors and lost loved ones, where they will clean the gravestones, replant flowers, and leave offerings in the deceased’s honor.

Naw-Rúz (“new day,” in Farsi) is the Bahá’í new year. It is a celebratory Holy Day marking the end of the fasting period and symbolizing the start of a new year in the Bahá’í calendar.

Zoroastrian and Persian New Years are also celebrated on the first day of spring and is called Nowruz. People clean their homes and visit relatives. On the eve of Nowruz, people prepare the way for the new year by jumping over bonfires. A central feature of Nowruz observance, especially in Iran, is the haft-sin, or “seven s’s,” called so because of the seven items beginning with the Persian letter s that are arranged on a special cloth (sofreh) on a table. The items represent renewal, springtime, and rebirth.

**March 31 - Transgender Day of Visibility (TDOV)** is celebrated annually, illuminating the lives and contributions of transgender people while spotlighting persistent discrimination.



### Founding and Growth

Activist Rachel Crandall Crocker established TDOV in 2009 via Transgender Michigan, deliberately contrasting November's Transgender Day of Remembrance - which honors those murdered due to anti-trans violence - by celebrating living transgender individuals. President Joe Biden marked a turning point with the inaugural White House proclamation in 2021 - later reiterated - condemning violence and discrimination against transgender people and urging equality. This duality bolsters trans communities, balancing remembrance of loss with empowerment through visibility.

Learn more: · Trans Student Educational Resources hub: <https://transstudent.org/tdov/>

Wikipedia timeline: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International\\_Transgender\\_Day\\_of\\_Visibility](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Transgender_Day_of_Visibility)

PBS origin story: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/the-history-behind-international-transgender-day-of-visibility>

NPR founder profile: <https://www.npr.org/2024/03/30/1241589753/transgender-day-of-visibility-rachel-crandall-crocker>

## UMASS REMINDER

### Use Your Excess Vacation Leave by June 27, 2026

As we get closer to fiscal year end, we want to remind you of the maximum accruals outlined in the [UMass Chan Holiday, and Personal and Vacation Time Policy](#) so you can plan accordingly.

As of the last full pay period of the fiscal year, the maximum number of vacation hours employees may carry over into the next fiscal year is 240. During the fiscal year, employees are allowed to accrue hours over 240. Hours over this accrual limit are automatically re-set in the payroll system to the accrual maximum. This year, **the relevant pay period ends Saturday, June 27, 2026**. You are encouraged to use any vacation balances that exceed the 240-hour maximum before that date. To avoid the loss of accrued vacation hours, review the following recommendations:

- Take all vacation over 240 hours before Saturday, June 27, 2026. Keep in mind that the vacation accrual for the pay period ending on that date that will not appear on your paycheck.
- Any hours over the cap will automatically be reset to 240 and will appear on your paycheck **on Friday, July 3, 2026**.
- If you are approaching 240 hours of accrued vacation time, talk with your manager about planning time off before June 27 and make sure it is approved by them.
- Ensure your vacation time has been entered into the Time Reporting system **by June 27, 2026**.



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| 🚩 Patriots' Day – Monday, April 20 <sup>th</sup>                       | 🚩 Veterans Day – Wednesday, November 11 <sup>th</sup>        |
| 🚩 Memorial Day – Monday, May 25 <sup>th</sup>                          | 🚩 Thanksgiving Day – Thursday, November 26 <sup>th</sup>     |
| 🚩 Juneteenth National Independence Day – Friday, June 19 <sup>th</sup> | 🚩 Day After Thanksgiving – Friday, November 27 <sup>th</sup> |
| 🚩 Independence Day – Friday, July 3 <sup>rd</sup> (observed)           | 🚩 Christmas Eve – Thursday, December 24 <sup>th</sup>        |
| 🚩 Labor Day – Monday, September 7 <sup>th</sup>                        | 🚩 Christmas Day – Friday, December 25 <sup>th</sup>          |
| 🚩 Indigenous Peoples' Day – Monday, October 12 <sup>th</sup>           |  |

*PQHS Weekly will be sent to all members of PQHS on Monday mornings. The intent is to provide a snapshot of what is going on that week in PQHS and to share our faculty and staff activities with the department. We depend on you to provide the items we need to share. Please send suggestions of events, faculty invited seminars & talks, honors, student thesis presentations, and news – new babies born! – to Judi ([judi.saber@umassmed.edu](mailto:judi.saber@umassmed.edu)) & Sarah ([sarah.yeboah@umassmed.edu](mailto:sarah.yeboah@umassmed.edu)) by Friday each week.*