

Key Points

Health equity is about making life better for every person in every zip code. LD 1693 presents an important opportunity to recognize and rebuild the underpinnings of Maine’s public health framework that have directly and indirectly contributed to health disparities in communities across the state.

Passing LD 1693 will restructure systems, strengthen programs, and assure sustained investments to advance health equity and improve the well-being of all people in Maine.

There are 5 major components to this bill:

- 1. Adds Definitions to State Statute:** “community health worker,” “community resilience,” “social determinants of health,” “social group,” “structural inequity,” and “systemic racism”
- 2. Tobacco Prevention and Control:**
 - ✓ Ensures full funding for the state’s tobacco prevention and control program at the level recommended by the US CDC
 - ✓ Reduces youth tobacco use by ending the sale of all flavored tobacco products
 - ✓ Reduces nicotine addiction among youth, who are particularly sensitive to price, by increasing Maine’s cigarette excise tax by \$2.00/pack
- 3. Obesity Prevention:**
 - ✓ Funds a Maine CDC obesity care coordinator and obesity prevention programming
 - ✓ Aligns early care and K-12 nutrition and physical activity standards with national standards
 - ✓ *Proposed Amendment:* Establishes an Obesity Advisory Council to support Maine CDC obesity prevention programming
- 4. Public Health Infrastructure:**
 - ✓ Assures an annual investment in systems and infrastructure to improve health equity
 - ✓ Allocates funding for public health districts’ health improvement plans
 - ✓ Establishes an office of health equity, including funding for the office’s director and data collection and reporting
- 5. Tobacco Settlement:** Secures the tobacco settlement for Maine kids and communities by establishing the Trust for a Healthy Maine, assuring these funds are used as intended – to reduce tobacco addiction and improve the health of Maine youth and young adults by funding health equity investments and Maine’s state health plan.

The Trust for a Healthy Maine

Securing the tobacco settlement for the health of Maine kids and communities

Key Points

Good health changes everything for families and businesses. Healthy kids are ready to learn, workers are more productive, seniors can stay in their homes, and employers spend less on insurance coverage. Good health makes Maine a place where businesses want to be, where young people want to stay, and where communities can grow and thrive.

Threats to health and productivity are unrelenting. In addition to COVID, serious concerns include youth vaping and nicotine addiction, trauma and toxic stress, opioid misuse and other substance use disorders, and diabetes. These put children at risk for a lifetime of poor health and leave employers struggling to maintain a healthy workforce.

The Fund for a Healthy Maine (FHM) budget is no longer sustainable. The tobacco settlement is Maine's primary source of funding for tobacco prevention and public health. But significantly lower payment projections (\$31 million/year) have made the current FHM budget for both public health and medical care (\$55 million) impossible to retain in the next biennium.

We can do more to ensure data-driven priority-setting for tobacco settlement dollars. The settlement language is clear that first and foremost, payments should advance policies to reduce youth smoking and promote public health. But the framework for the FHM has become outdated and inflexible, constrained by the 2-year budget cycle. To be resilient and prepared for public health challenges, we need a more planful, nimble system for prioritizing public health investments.

It's time to rethink how we address health disparities and make best use of Maine's tobacco

settlement. We've learned a great deal since receiving Maine's first settlement payment – both from within Maine and from other states. What would we create today if we were starting from scratch?

Restructuring the tobacco settlement is the only viable option. The Trust for a Healthy Maine will be a fresh start – designed to be forward-thinking, but with 20 years of experience behind it. The Trust for a Healthy Maine will:

- **Establish a 15-member board of trustees with expertise and experience in public health** to develop evidence-informed funding priorities that align with an overall state health plan and support the Maine CDC and its partners in responding to the state's most critical public health priorities.
- **Balance the tobacco settlement budget and allow for long-term planning**, because public health problems are seldom solved, and health and economic benefits are rarely measurable, within a 2-year budget cycle.
- **Guarantee the first priority for tobacco settlement dollars is preventing tobacco use and nicotine addiction** in Maine children and adults by funding Maine's tobacco program at U.S. CDC recommended levels.
- **Guarantee an annual investment in the systems and community-based infrastructure necessary to achieve health equity**, no matter who you are or where you live in Maine, including data collection, planning, community-led partnerships, workforce development, training, and technical assistance.
- **Ensure that the cost of medical care doesn't overwhelm Maine's limited funding for disease prevention** by phasing out the use of settlement dollars for medical care.
- **Create an annual Flex Fund for rapid response**, which trustees can designate as needed throughout the year, **and an Internal Stabilization Account**, to provide a buffer against future fluctuations in settlement payments.

Creating the Trust for a Healthy Maine is about Maine kids and communities. Restructuring the tobacco settlement will help build and sustain a modern, cost-effective system of public health for Maine, where every child has the opportunity to learn and grow, with healthy brains and bodies, in communities that offer hope, connection, and a productive future.

