

Health Care Affordability Advisory Task Force Meeting #1 Notes

Date: September 12, 2025, 9:00 am – 12:00 pm

Urban Research and Outreach-Engagement Center (UROC), Room 105

Meeting Summary

Alex Caldwell (director, Center for Health Care Affordability [the Center]) and Carol Backstrom (assistant commissioner for Health Systems Bureau, Minnesota Department of Health [MDH]) welcomed task force members and stakeholders who joined in person and online.

Alex Caldwell explained that The Center’s role is to identify health care spending drivers and to raise policy ideas that could slow spending growth while making care more affordable for patients, employers, and taxpayers.

Task force members introduced themselves and shared why they chose to commit to the effort. Many members shared personal stories—their own and those of their families and communities—with the high cost of care. Members emphasized the importance of working together to identify actionable steps that will help all Minnesotans.

Stefan Gildemeister (Director, MDH Health Economics Program [HEP]) gave a presentation on health care spending in Minnesota. His goal was to provide a shared starting point, give context, and encourage members to raise questions about areas of interest.

Julie Sonier (lead facilitator, Mathematica) led a discussion on members’ first impressions and questions, including what items in the data presentation stood out to task force members, what items were surprising, and what topics members would like to learn more about. Key themes from the discussion included:

- Definitions and Framing
 - Create shared definitions for key terms including affordability, cost, spending, value, sustainability, and equity.
- Data Needs and Measurement
 - Establish a baseline period to measure future recommendations and actions.
 - Break down increases in year-over-year health care spending by payer (for example, Medicaid and commercial).
 - Explore spending data in more detail (for example, spending by region or by type of service).
 - Analyze whether health care spending growth is mainly due to using more care, rising prices for services, or a combination of these factors.

- Look into data on the amount of reserves held by non-profit health plans and hospital systems and how they are using those resources.
- Consider the availability and potential value of more recent state and national health care spending data.
- Comparative Analyses
 - Study changes in year-over-year growth in health care spending in Minnesota and why growth was slower in some years.
 - Compare Minnesota's spending by service type with other states.
 - Look into why Minnesota's ranking in the Commonwealth Fund's state health scorecard fell (from #4 in 2009 to #15 in 2025).
 - Explore why health spending per person in the United States is higher than in other industrialized countries.
- Broader Economic and Policy Impacts
 - Recognize that the health care sector is a major part of Minnesota's economy and consider its impacts (such as employment, tax revenue, and investments) when discussing spending trends.
 - Explore the potential impacts of the 2025 Federal Budget Reconciliation Law on health care affordability.
- Care, Outcomes, and Missed Care
 - Discuss how to measure the cost difference between timely care and the higher costs of delayed care.
 - Estimate how much the state could save by spending more on primary care to avoid more expensive care in the future and better understand where missed care is most common across regions and income groups.
- Voices and Narratives
 - Recognize individual stories as a valuable form of data to understand how spending growth and cost increases affect workers and employers.
 - Include stories from patients, providers, and caregivers into each task force meeting, highlighting both challenges and the positive experiences the task force aims to support.

Alex Caldwell closed the meeting by thanking members for their participation. She explained that the next task force meeting on October 16th will focus on defining affordability, a framework for how to measure progress, and the roadmap for the task force's work through summer of 2027.

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR HEALTH CARE AFFORDABILITY

The Minnesota Center for Health Care Affordability at the Minnesota Department of Health is committed to making health care more affordable for all Minnesotans.

The Center identifies cost drivers, provides transparent research, and advances solutions that stabilize health care spending so that Minnesotans can afford the high-quality care they need.

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