



# Health Equity Happenings

April 2026

Achieving zero health disparities by promoting equity-centered, trauma-informed health care across Missouri.

Community Health  
Commission Newsletter

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# MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



Dear partners, friends, and allies across the state,

Thank you for your continued commitment to a Missouri where all residents have the opportunity to access the resources, services, and support they need to live healthy, thriving lives.

As we move through the second half of the 2026 legislative session, we remain clear-eyed about risks to health access—particularly amid changes to Medicaid. Across community and provider tables, we are hearing how these shifts are showing up in real time: for patients navigating coverage and care, and for providers working within already strained systems. In this moment, we remain grounded in elevating lived experience and frontline insight to advance practical, common-sense solutions.

This work lives at the intersection of community and systems. Beyond advocacy, our role is to translate, convene, and support implementation—connecting what we hear on the ground with the systems responsible for responding. How we navigate these changes together matters as much as the changes themselves.

Our storytelling work continues to highlight the importance of community-led healing. We see this across our Day of Racial Healing engagements and through our Youth Advisory Council, where young people are shaping decisions that impact their mental health and wellbeing. These conversations affirm what we know: sustainable change must be community-led and system-supported.

We also continue to show up as both contributors and learners—bringing Missouri perspectives into national conversations, while deepening place-based work here at home. From partnerships like Envisioning REPAIR in Kansas City to regional film screenings of *Everybody's Work*, we are creating space for dialogue, connection, and shared understanding across communities and systems.

As the film reminds us: this is everybody's work. It does not live within a single sector or moment. Achieving zero health disparities requires shared ownership, sustained partnership, and a willingness to stay engaged—even when the path forward is complex.

We invite you to join us—through our Health Access Coordination Taskforce, Advisory Boards, policy efforts, or regional events—as we continue building a healthier, more equitable Missouri together.

With gratitude and in solidarity,

-r

*Riisa Rawlins*

Chief Executive Officer  
Community Health Commission of Missouri (CHCM)



# MO LEGISLATIVE SESSION UPDATES

In the 2026 legislative session, CHCM is advocating for policies that strengthen communities and support the health and well-being of all Missourians.

## CHCM submits testimony in opposition to HJR 173 and HJR 174

In January, the Community Health Commission of Missouri (CHCM) submitted testimony to the House Commerce Committee in opposition to HJR 173 and HJR 174. While these proposals are framed as economic growth measures, they would shift the tax burden onto working families and retirees, deepen existing inequities, and threaten funding for essential public services that Missourians rely on every day.

Read our [full testimony](#) to understand the health, economic, and budgetary impacts of these proposals—and why CHCM urges a **NO vote**.

### Key Takeaways

- These proposals would raise taxes on low- and middle-income Missouri families
- They would provide the largest tax cuts to the wealthiest households
- They would reduce funding for essential services, including education, public health, and community programs
- They would worsen existing inequities across Missouri communities

Missouri's Proposed "Tax Swap":  
A Community Health Alert



**What is the "Tax Swap" (HJR 173 & 174)?**  
Missouri is considering a massive change to how it collects money. Instead of taxing your **income** (the money you earn), the state wants to tax **services** (the money you spend).  
To pay for this, the state would start charging sales tax on services that are currently tax-free (like haircuts, car repairs, and legal fees).

**How would the "Tax Swap" affect my wallet?**  
Whether this helps you or hurts you depends on how much money you make and how you spend it.

- Low-to-middle income families may pay more. These families spend most of their paycheck on goods and services, things they need every day. If sales taxes go up, they may end up paying more than they save from lower income taxes.
- Seniors & retirees often face a "net loss." Many seniors already pay little to no state income tax on Social Security. They wouldn't get a "cut," but they would see the price of services go up.
- Higher earners generally see the biggest benefit. They keep more of their large paychecks, and the new sales taxes usually don't cancel out those savings.

**How is tax policy a health issue?**

**Financial Health = Physical Health**  
When families lose money to new taxes on services (car repairs, home maintenance, laundry), they often cut back on:

- Prescription medications and co-pays
- healthy, fresh groceries, and
- dental and vision care.

**Tax impacts stress.**  
Consistent (chronic) financial strain is a primary driver of high blood pressure (hypertension), anxiety, and depression.

Adding an estimated \$500+ yearly cost to low-income households increases the "toxic stress" that leads to long-term illness.



[Download our one-pager.](#)



## CHCM submits testimony in support of funding for the Missouri Housing Trust Fund as part of HB 2007

In February, CHCM submitted testimony to the House Budget Committee in support of funding for the Missouri Housing Trust Fund as part of HB 2007. Stable housing is a foundational driver of health, workforce stability, and long-term economic resilience across Missouri. In our testimony, CHCM urges lawmakers to approve the proposed \$6.5 million allocation, emphasizing that investments in housing reduce costly downstream impacts in healthcare and emergency systems while strengthening communities statewide. Read the [full testimony](#) to learn why CHCM supports funding for the Missouri Housing Trust Fund.

# MO LEGISLATIVE SESSION UPDATES

## Safeguarding Missouri's Safety Net: What Federal Cuts Mean at the Local Level

Federal budget decisions may feel distant, but their impact is immediate and local. In Missouri, proposed cuts to public health, research, and social support programs have real implications for how communities access care, respond to crises, and maintain stability. [Riisa Rawlins](#), CHCM CEO explores what those changes could mean on the ground for Missourians and why it matters.

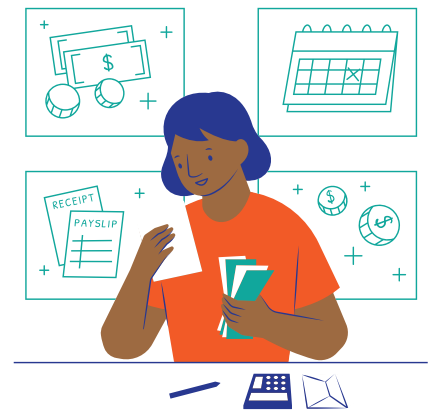
[Download](#) a copy of Riisa's reflection here or share with partners!

[Read on the blog](#)



"Protecting access to care, strengthening local infrastructure, and maintaining the tools needed to respond to emerging challenges are not just policy decisions—they are practical investments in the health and wellbeing of our state."

- Riisa Rawlins, MSW



## Legislative Session Engagement


As the legislative session continues, our team has been actively engaging with state leaders to elevate what we're hearing from communities and partners across Missouri. In recent weeks, we've met with the Office of the Governor, Bill Anderson (Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy and Legislation), Speaker of the House Rep. Jon Patterson, Rep. Melanie Stinnett (Chair, Health & Mental Health Policy Committee), Rep. Holly Jones (Chair, Children and Families Committee), Sarah Willson (Director, Department of Health and Senior Services), and Senator Brian Williams.

These conversations are an important part of our work at the intersection of community and systems—ensuring that lived experience and frontline insight are informing policy decisions that impact health access, behavioral health, and family well-being across our state.

# PROTECTING MEDICAID

## Through Our Eyes: Medicaid Storytelling

CHCM partnered with [FamiliesUSA](#), a national nonpartisan organization dedicated to elevating patient voices and advancing equitable access to health care, to launch a statewide storytelling campaign elevating the real voices behind Missouri's health-care system. The project captures firsthand experiences from residents across the state—patients, caregivers, Medicaid recipients, and community members—to ensure that those most affected by health policies lead the conversation about what needs to change.

Here are a few stories that highlight the experiences of Missourians across the state. Read the full collection on our [website](#). 

### [Dariya Walker, St. Louis](#)

Dariya Walker is a high school student in Florissant, Missouri. Dariya and her family use Medicaid to access health care services, and she appreciates the peace of mind that having coverage gives her and her family. "It's good to know that I don't have to be worried about my health." Even if an illness or injury can be treated at home, it helps ease Dariya's anxiety to know that going to a doctor's office or hospital is always an option. "If I did have to have surgery, Medicaid is going to help cover what needs to be covered because that's what it's there for," she shared.



### [Andrea Martin, Kansas City](#)

Andrea Martin in Lee's Summit, Missouri, was born with a congenital heart defect. She worked throughout her life, often juggling multiple jobs, until she had a heart attack at 35. "I could no longer work. I lost my job. I lost health insurance. And I had to get on Medicaid. I was denied at first, but I appealed it and got it approved." Approval allowed Andrea to join St. Luke's heart transplant program. "That was actually a requirement to get on the transplant list. Thank God for Medicaid, or I wouldn't have gotten listed or the care I needed."



### [Hillary Harris, Southeast Missouri](#)

Hillary Harris lives in Sikeston, Missouri with her three daughters, who are all under the age of ten. Medicaid has been absolutely crucial in providing her and her family what they need to stay safe and healthy, both mentally and physically. "My connection to Medicaid goes deeper than just it being insurance," she shared. Medicaid has covered the medication and treatment that Hillary needed for her mental health, especially after the birth of her children.




# Day of Racial Healing


## Day of Racial Healing

This year marked the Community Health Commission of Missouri's first formal observance of the Day of Racial Healing. The National Day of Racial Healing, launched in 2017, builds on the work of the Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation (TRHT) initiative hosted by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. In this inaugural year, we were intentional about meeting communities where they are and honoring the truth that healing does not look the same in every region, or for every person.





In the  Kansas City region, we convened a broad and diverse community for a film screening and panel discussion that invited reflection, dialogue, and shared responsibility.



In  Southeast Missouri, we gathered healing circles, including community partners healing alongside their teams, older adults who are regularly in relationship with one another, and a mixed group of partners connected through our broader ecosystem.



In  St. Louis, we held an intimate convening focused on healing for the healers. This gathering centered those who carry the emotional, relational, and spiritual weight of equity and community work every day.

Building on this work, CHCM continued to hold space for reflection and dialogue throughout Black History Month—centering community voices, lived experiences, and the ongoing connection between racial healing and health equity. Watch the reflections [here](#). 



“The Day of Racial Healing invites us to pause—to reflect on the ways racialized harm has shaped our communities and to recommit ourselves to healing, equity, and justice. At CHCM, we understand this work not as a single day or moment, but as a practice that unfolds over time and across place.”

**RIISA RAWLINS, CEO**

*Read her full reflection [here](#).*

## Youth Advisory Council Launch

In partnership with the [St. Louis County Children's Service Fund \(CSF\)](#), we have officially launched the Youth Advisory Council (YAC), a new initiative designed to ensure young people have a meaningful role in shaping mental and behavioral health investments across St. Louis County.

The inaugural Council brings together students from Jennings School District, Parkway Schools, and The School District of University City, creating a cross-district cohort of 18 young leaders who will help identify priority needs, inform funding decisions, and elevate perspectives grounded in lived experience. Over the course of a two-year term, Council members will engage in a structured, collaborative process to guide how \$150k is invested to support youth mental health across the county.

“

“By joining the Youth Advisory Council, I hope to learn how to build a professional network, build self-confidence and a sense of empowerment through your contributions to community projects and initiatives.”

**Tori**

Student, University City High School

“

“When students are trusted to lead and make their own choices, they shine. They are eager to provide leadership, opinion, shared experience, and to demonstrate mutual cooperation and responsibility.”

**Cherie Magueja**

Director of Social-Emotional Support Services Parkway Schools

CHCM serves as the convener and strategic partner, designing and facilitating Council sessions, guiding the participatory process. Working alongside CSF, district leaders, and educators, we ensure youth voices are meaningfully integrated into funding decisions. The Youth Advisory Council reflects a shared commitment to strengthening youth leadership pathways, deepening collaboration across school communities, and ensuring that mental health investments are responsive to the needs young people identify.



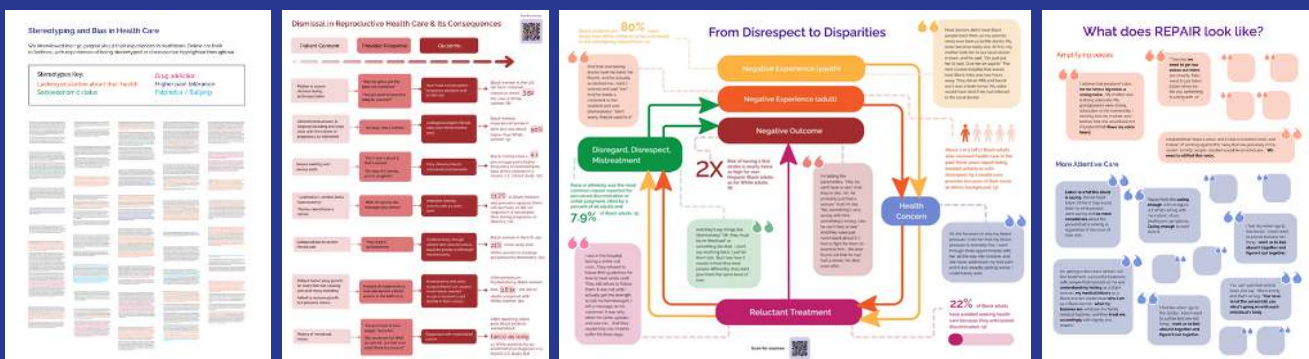
## Envisioning REPAIR: Centering Truth, Creating Space for Action

On March 23, Community Health Commission of Missouri joined partners in Kansas City for Envisioning REPAIR: A Truth and Reconciliation Event. Together, we brought healthcare providers, community members, and leaders into a shared space to center Black community members' experiences of healthcare harm and reflect on what meaningful repair can look like in practice.

A key component of the event was the interactive data walk, which translated lived experiences and qualitative insights into visual, accessible formats. Through stations exploring themes like stereotyping, reproductive health, and the relationship between disrespect and health outcomes, participants engaged deeply with both the data and the stories behind it.



Together, storytelling, video, and dialogue helped ground the evening in a shared understanding: this work is not about blame, but about accountability, healing, and forward movement.



For those who attended or those engaging with this work beyond the event, we invite you to [explore](#) the data walk materials and additional resources available through the REPAIR Project. These materials are designed to extend the experience, offering space to reflect, learn, and continue the conversation toward equity-centered change.

## Families USA Health Action Conference

In January, CHCM Chief Strategy Officer, [Danielle Binion](#) and Senior Manager of Communications, [Grace Cobble](#) joined advocates from across the country to learn, connect, and build power for health justice. A standout session they attended focused on storytelling, featuring partners using lived experience to drive advocacy across issues and movements. That conversation especially resonated given our Medicaid storytelling work and partnership with Families USA, who continue to model what it looks like to center story as strategy.



We were also proud to see Missouri represented on a featured rural health panel by partners from the Missouri Budget Project, lifting up the realities facing rural communities and the policy choices that shape access to care.

The conference was a powerful reminder that meaningful health policy change happens when community voice is centered, shared, and taken seriously. We're excited to carry these insights back into our work across Missouri.

For more information about our partnership with FamiliesUSA, visit our [website](#).

## Celebrating Danielle Binion as a 2026 Lift Her Up Honoree

We are proud to celebrate our Chief Strategy Officer, [Dr. Danielle Binion](#), on being named a 2026 Lift Her Up Honoree. Lift Her Up recognizes women of color who are leading, building, and creating change in their communities. Honorees are trailblazers who use their voice, influence, and commitment to uplift others and open doors for what's possible.

Danielle embodies that spirit fully. Her leadership is grounded in equity, shaped by deep community connection, and driven by a vision for systems that truly support healing and health. Whether guiding strategy, advancing policy, or creating space for honest conversation, she brings both clarity and care to this work.

To be recognized in a space intentionally created to uplift and celebrate Black women, and to contribute to conversations on health equity in that space, reflects the kind of leadership Danielle brings every day.

Danielle was honored at the Lift Her Up annual breakfast and celebration on March 21, 2026 at the Downtown Convention Center in Kansas City, where hundreds of women from across the region gathered to celebrate this year's honorees and the collective power of women uplifting one another.

We are grateful for her leadership and proud to celebrate this well-deserved recognition.



# UPCOMING EVENTS

## Film Screening: Everybody's Work

In recognition of National Nurses Week (May 6-12), the Community Health Commission of Missouri (CHCM) will host a regional film screening series of *Everybody's Work* followed by a cross-sector, community-led dialogue on racial equity in nursing, workforce well-being, and institutional healing.

The documentary offers a powerful lens into systemic barriers, bias, recruitment inequities, and the need for institutional accountability. This film elevates a critical question: *Why do nurses of color have different experiences than their counterparts?*

This event uplifts the lived experiences of Nurses of Color while creating space to:

- Celebrate the contributions of nurses
- Interrogate disparities within systems of care
- Engage students and emerging professionals
- Promote Equity-Centered Trauma-Informed Care (EC-TIC), healing, and community well-being
- Elevate community voices through storytelling and lived experience



May 12, 2026



6:00-9:00 pm



Harris Stowe University

[Register here](#)

Film Screening in Recognition of National Nurses Week

# EVERYBODY'S WORK

In honor of the **National Day of Racial Healing**, the Community Health Commission of Missouri (CHCM), in partnership with AWHONN, invites you to an evening of reflection and conversation.

Join us for a special screening of *Everybody's Work* by SHIFT Films and Chad Tingle, followed by a facilitated discussion centering collective healing and the lived experiences of practitioners and advocates. Together, let's build more equitable systems of care!

**This event is free and will include light refreshments.**

**Tuesday May 12, 2026 | 6:00 PM - 9:30 PM**  
**Harris Stowe University, William Clay Sr. Building**  
**3026 Laclede Ave, St. Louis, MO 63103**

**REGISTER TODAY!**

# UPCOMING EVENTS

Join us for an [upcoming meeting](#) or workshop! All CHCM advisory board meetings are open to the public, and we invite you to get involved.

Have questions? Contact [Joy Kuebee](#) by emailing [executiveassistant@chcmmissouri.org](mailto:executiveassistant@chcmmissouri.org).

## Community Institutional Review Board Convening #1



April 27th,  
2:00-3:15 pm

[Learn more](#)



## Wellness & Care Advisory Board Meeting



April 28th,  
9:30-10:30am

[Learn more](#)

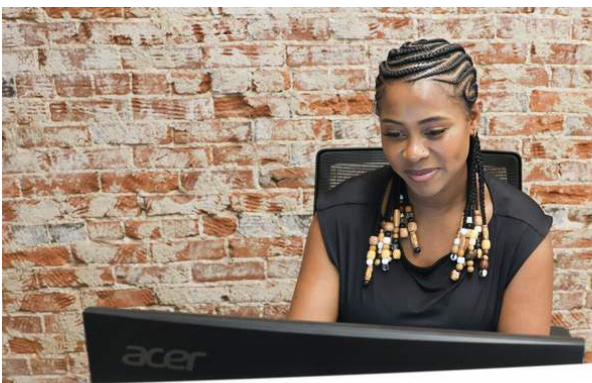


## Provider Services Advisory Board Meeting



May 5th,  
7:30-8:30am

[Learn more](#)



## GET IN TOUCH

[Contact us online](#) or by calling our team at 314-898-4049.

By Mail:  
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St. Louis MO 63139

The CHCM April 2026 newsletter was authored and co-designed by Varsha Arun, CHCM Public Health Intern and Grace Cobble, MPH Senior Manager of Storytelling & Communications.