

## **Don Berwick Candidate Questionnaire Responses 2014**

### **1. What will be your top public health priorities if elected governor?**

I have spent my career as a physician and an executive fighting for better health care all over the world. My top public health priorities center around what I call the Triple Aim—achieving better care, better health, and lower cost through improvement. At a time when Massachusetts spends 42% of its budget on health care, it is imperative that the next Governor understands what better care at lower cost looks like. As Governor, I will work to make our health care system simpler, less costly, and more responsive to the needs of patients:

- We will make Massachusetts the healthiest state in the nation, through smoking cessation, obesity prevention and reduction, and specific programs to curb domestic and physical violence.
- By calling on evidence-based best practices from around the world, we will reduce substance abuse and suicide rates by 50% in Massachusetts in the next decade.
- I will bring my thirty years as a leader in the national patient safety movement to Massachusetts. Together, we will make Massachusetts a leader in patient safety.

To make the kind of investments we need in public health, Massachusetts needs to reform its health care payment system. I am the only candidate for Governor favoring single payer health care, like Medicare for All. Single payer will be accountable to the public—for example, if we want our care to be more focused on prevention, mental health services, and the substance abuse epidemic, there is a transparent, publicly accountable entity that will hear those concerns. It will reduce costs and free up providers to focus to their efforts on treating patients and investing in wellness programs that improve the health of populations. And it provides leverage to move away from the fee-for-service model and towards the coordinated, integrated, team-based care that keeps people home and well.

### **2. We know that our health is closely related to our zip code – people living in low income communities and communities of color live shorter lives and have a higher burden of illness. What are three specific actions you would take to change this?**

As a pediatrician caring for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, I learned that the air children breathe, the food they eat, the safety of the streets they walk on, the quality of their schools, the economic security of their parents, and more, played *at least* as big a role in their health outcomes as the medical care they receive. To create real health, we need

to invest in the strength and wellbeing of neighborhoods and communities. This idea is key to why I want to be Governor. As Governor, I will focus on:

- Smart growth. Through investment and proper zoning, we can promote transit-oriented development, complete streets, and vibrant downtowns with access to nutritious food, and open spaces. This will improve air quality and promote healthy lifestyles through walking, biking, and proper nutrition.
- Community health centers and primary care. The evidence is clear. Community-based health systems are extremely effective at managing chronic illness and providing preventive care. They lower costs and improve outcomes. But far too many low-income neighborhoods lack access to the primary care they need. I will double down on investments that allow for the expansion of community health centers, particularly in low-income communities.
- Fight for environmental justice. I am deeply troubled by the disproportionate impact of climate change on lower-income communities and communities of color. Beyond the damage to public health caused by polluting facilities, the damage from climate change-induced storms tends to be more highly concentrated on these communities. This is wrong. I am fully committed to addressing the issue of environmental injustice as a component of a broader effort to reduce social and economic inequality in our Commonwealth, and I will consider alternative structures to assure accountability in reaching that goal.

**3. We know the best way to control healthcare costs is through focusing on prevention-oriented solutions before we ever get sick; however, Department of Public Health programs whose purposes are to prevent chronic diseases have been affected most by budget cuts during the recent recession. As governor, would you support increased state funding for chronic disease prevention programs?**

Absolutely. Restoring adequate state funding levels to support chronic disease prevention programs is essential to making Massachusetts the healthiest state in the nation. For example, improving access to evidenced-based smoking cessation programs, enhancing our substance abuse treatment system, and ending the obesity epidemic in our state are three vital chronic disease prevention initiatives that will require more investment on the state level. We need a Governor who understands the importance of these programs and fight for them accordingly. As Governor, that will be my fight.

**4. We know that actions by state agencies related to housing, development, and transportation impact our health. How would you support and encourage these “non-health” agencies to consider the health impacts of their policies and practices?**

“Non-health” factors play a critical role in influencing the health outcomes of all residents. I will work to strengthen neighborhoods and communities, particularly in disadvantaged areas of our state that have suffered from chronic underinvestment and neglect. Among others, I will focus my efforts on housing, transportation, and education:

Housing and Homelessness:

- Public housing. Much of our housing stock is old, outdated, and unhealthy. As a pediatrician, I know that 40% of asthma symptoms come from residential conditions. I will expand the Capital Improvement and Preservation Fund to ensure that state owned-public housing is free of lead paint, asbestos, and other health risks. I will also expand efforts to insulate and weatherize homes to reduce our carbon footprint, and lower energy costs.
- End chronic homelessness. Massachusetts spends over \$30,000 per chronically homeless individual each year. The bulk of this is spent on health care, particularly visits to the emergency room that could be easily prevented by placing individuals in housing. ‘Housing First’ models like Home and Healthy for Good and the 100,000 Homes campaign place chronically homeless individuals in permanent supportive housing and offer comprehensive supports—including mental health, substance abuse, and job training programs. These programs have shown an 85% retention rate, dramatically improve health outcomes, and save the state thousands per year. We have the resources; we have the methods; now we need the will.
- Fight family homelessness. The state spends \$4,000 a month each time it houses a homeless family in a motel. For many, this means cramming several children in one room with no kitchen, far from their schools and doctors, with minimal access to public transportation, and no access to their support system. This takes a serious toll on health and wellbeing. Instead, we can spend less than \$1,000 per month on a rental voucher that allows families to enter the housing market. The state will save money, and health outcomes will improve dramatically.

Transportation and Development:

- Invest in public transportation. I will make a direct case for new investments in our public transportation system that improve service and expand access—both in the

MBTA and our Regional Transit Authorities (RTA). More ridership strengthens our economy and encourages healthy living. We must, therefore, do everything we can to avoid fare increases that impact the lowest income residents.

- Encourage communities to invest in dense multi-family housing and transit oriented development. Smart growth and zoning reform are essential to increasing our housing stock, but they are also important strategies to facilitate healthy lifestyles. As Governor, I will defend 40B, expand the 40R Smart Growth Trust Fund, and recapitalize the Brownfields Program. I will work to make it easier for housing to be built closer to public transportation, allowing families easy and affordable access to jobs, school, and their communities.

#### Education:

- For far too many children, the meals they eat at school are their most substantial of the day. While schools did not cause the problem, they are essential to addressing it. We must make sure that school lunches are adequate and nutritious, and that school curriculums help instill healthy eating habits in children who may not receive such guidance at home.
- By investing in proven programs that provide support to high-risk youth and offer alternative pathways to a prosperous life, we can attack the root causes of youth violence, reduce gang participation, and improve the health of our communities.

#### **5. This year hundreds of people in Massachusetts died as a result of opiate overdoses. As governor, what would you do to prevent substance abuse and overdose?**

Our Commonwealth faces an epidemic, and it should be treated accordingly. As Governor, I see three major components to an effective substance abuse strategy:

- Emergency response to prevent unnecessary deaths. I will work to ensure that all first responders are trained and equipped with naloxone rescue kits. We should also consider expanding this program into our criminal justice system.
- Thwart addiction before it begins. To do so, we ought to recognize that addiction is often the result of desperation—either emotional or economic—and fight these underlying causes. In addition, although addiction is by no means a problem confined to the poor, poverty and substance abuse are often related, and I intend that we shall commit to an end to poverty in this Commonwealth. I am also struck

by the high percentage of opiate addiction that begins with abuse of prescription drugs that teens and young adults find in their parent's medicine cabinet. And I am excited by the public awareness campaigns and buy-back efforts that encourage families to get rid of narcotics they no longer need. To build on such efforts, I would work to expand substance abuse education and other programs specifically designed to keep prescription painkillers and other opiates out of the hands of young people. For example, I would also strengthen the state's partnership with the Brandeis University Prescription Drug Monitoring Program, and enhance related collaboration with other states and Governors in New England to have strategic regional monitoring system.

- Expand rehabilitation services. This starts with avoiding incarceration as a solution. A week of treatment costs ten percent of what it costs to incarcerate. With these savings and additional resources, we will eliminate wait lists for treatment programs, and expand drug courts that provide addiction services that provide medically accurate, evidence-based and respectful services. We will work with individuals and their families to identify the causes of their addiction and create individualized action plans to make sure that they do not relapse.

**6. Do you think our state's tax system is stable, equitable, aligned with health policy, and sufficient to meet our public needs? If not, what changes do you support?**

No. Any candidate who says that the state does not need new revenue simply isn't telling the truth. Massachusetts cannot afford not to invest in the essential services that support the middle class and strengthen the social safety net. We must make a choice; – it's spend now or spend (more) later.

Massachusetts needs to move towards a fair tax system that asks people with lower incomes to pay less, and people with higher incomes to pay more. I will both advocate for a constitutional amendment to implement a progressive income tax and work within existing law to further this goal. We also need to hit the reset button on loopholes and exemptions. I will join with legislators in a comprehensive and transparent review of all tax breaks. If an exemption helps to create jobs or strengthen the safety net, I will support it; if not, I will work to end it. There is no place for tax breaks that benefit only the wealthy and well connected.

But we should also look to find revenue through eliminating waste and redundancies. Single payer health care would save hundreds of millions from the state budget and new investments in

other essential programs. This revenue could be spent on new investments in preventive care, or supports to programs critical to the health and wellbeing of communities.

**7. How do you plan to vote on ballot questions 1 and 4 on the upcoming November ballot?**

**a. Q1: Repeal of gas tax indexing**

I will be voting against Q1 to repeal gas tax indexing. We should keep the current indexing system to ensure we recoup some of the gas tax purchasing power lost over the last 15 years and to guard against any further erosion. The gas tax may be necessary in the current environment, but it is not our future. Moving forward, it's vital that the Commonwealth transitions to a greener vehicle fleet and an overall transportation system that relies on renewable sources energy, not fossil fuels. As we shift to such a system, we'll need to implement other models of revenue generation that ask people to pay according to what they use – methods like a “vehicle miles traveled” fee structure, (with strict attention to privacy concerns). I believe that a modernized fee system can be equitable, efficient, and responsive to the needs of travelers.

**b. Q4: Earned paid sick leave**

I will be voting in favor Q4 to enhance earned paid sick leave benefits for Massachusetts employees. We must provide adequate paid sick leave and unemployment benefits so people can transition back into the economy and support their families. The recent increase in the state minimum wage was an important step in ensuring living wages and secure working conditions. We still need to do more for our workers, and passing Q4 will a helpful next step.