

Steve Grossman Candidate Questionnaire Responses 2014

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

To truly build One Commonwealth that levels the playing field and leaves no one behind, we need to revolutionize the delivery of health care services to reduce or eliminate health disparities, primarily by significantly increasing our investment in community hospitals and community health centers. At the same time we must use every appropriate tool to reign in excessive price increases at our largest medical institutions that would severely undermine the goals of Chapter 224.

We must also refocus our efforts to address the crisis of mental illness hurting so many families. While Massachusetts has parity in the legal sense, we still do not yet have true mental health parity. Patients in an acute psychiatric emergency spend hours, sometimes days waiting in emergency rooms for the care they need. Outpatient mental health clinics are not paid adequately, and the result has been a reduction in service. In the face of financial challenges, psychiatric units of community hospitals face being closed. Long-term care patients remain stuck in state hospital beds after they are ready to return to the community because there are no community placements for them. We must significantly reverse the downward trend in Massachusetts, where we have cut our funding for mental health services more than any other New England state since 2009.

My administration will commit the funds to ensure a robust community mental health system and eliminate the systemic obstacles to ensuring that mental health consumers are able to receive services at the appropriate level of care. My administration will also bring together the health plans, public and private sector providers, advocates, and consumers to make sure that the health care system works as well for those with mental illness as it does for those with any other medical illness. Given the tremendous growth of immigrant populations with dozens of languages spoken across Massachusetts, we need to recruit, train, and retain mental health professionals with both language skills and cultural competence. In regards to the opioid epidemic, given the tremendous increase of 12-17 year olds who have used illegal drugs, I believe we need to enhance drug awareness and education programs for middle and high school students. I will partner with the federal government to launch a statewide drug awareness campaign that targets teenagers, highlighting the impact of drug abuse, particularly with prescription drugs and opiates.

Our Commonwealth has a proven record of success with similar types of programs. In the early 1990s, Massachusetts partnered with the American Cancer Society to launch a statewide anti-smoking program that in addition to hotlines, new legislation, and 2 initiatives aimed at young people, also launched an intense advertising campaign. The results were dramatic: per capita cigarette consumption declined by more than 47 percent in the state.

I will also invest \$10 million in a new competitive grant program called "Massachusetts Healthy Living," building on the Obama administration's Mental Health First Aid program. We need to provide local communities and schools with access to the resources they need to increase prevention, awareness, and training around the issues of mental illness, substance misuse, and behavioral health care, particularly among our vulnerable teen and young adult population. We

must recognize the need to treat issues of addiction and mental illness as issues of public health, not criminal justice.

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?

I believe that the quality of your health care should not depend on the size of your paycheck. This is a fundamental principle and issue of fairness. I support affordable health care for all. Massachusetts led the nation in access to health care, and now we're poised to lead again on the critical issue of cost control. But fundamentally, we need to revolutionize the delivery of health care to better serve our most vulnerable populations.

First, our shared goal is for quality care to be delivered at the lowest cost setting possible, and we need to seek ways to shift care and invest more heavily in our community hospitals and our community health centers. Particularly in rural areas on the state, we need to address the shortage of primary care doctors and nurse practitioners.

Second, we need to incentivize and encourage employers to invest in wellness programs, by promoting wellness programs, which research demonstrates return \$3.27 for every \$1 invested.

Third, I'm deeply disturbed that we have cut our funding for mental health services more than any other New England state since 2009. As governor, I will be an unwavering advocate to increase this funding and ensure our Commonwealth invests in its most vulnerable citizens during times of urgent need.

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?

Yes, I support increasing state funding for chronic disease prevention programs. I also support increasing funding for family planning programs that serve low-income communities.

Underfunding programs that provide HIV testing and counseling, contraception, and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, among other services, not only denies our most vulnerable residents the health care coverage, treatment, and counseling they desperately need, but it is also economically wrong. You judge a society by how it spends its resources. As governor, I will be deeply committed to ensuring that we spend the appropriate amount of funds on these services and programs.

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?

To address the disproportionate impact of state actions and policies, particularly regarding pollution, on low-income communities, I will hire a Director of Environmental Justice, and invite them to a new working group, co-chaired by secretaries of energy and environmental affairs, housing and economic development, and transportation, to better integrate both the design and impact of policies aimed to reduce our carbon footprint and prepare the state for the challenges of climate change in the 21st century.

In particular, our commitment to fully fund the Governor’s \$13 billion “The Way Forward” transportation plan, which among other things is designed to dramatically reduce carbon emissions, will create a far healthier environment than we currently have.

If our housing plans, which call for a dramatic increase in multi-family unit housing construction, are aligned with our modern transportation plan, significantly more people will live closer to transportation hubs and either bike, walk, or use transit. This will create healthier communities and dramatically reduce carbon emissions.

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?

An addiction epidemic is destroying too many Massachusetts families. As governor, I will take bold, urgent steps to respond and implement policies to treat addiction as a public health crisis and encourage treatment, rather than stigmatize it.

- I will enhance drug awareness and education programs for middle school and high school students. My administration will partner with the federal government to launch a statewide drug awareness campaign that targets teenagers, highlighting the impact of drug abuse.
- I will invest \$10 million in a new competitive grant program called “Massachusetts Healthy Living,” building on the Obama administration’s Mental Health First Aid program. We’ll provide local communities and schools with access to the resources they need to increase prevention, awareness, and training around the issues of mental illness, substance misuse, and behavioral health care, particularly among our vulnerable teen and young adult population.
- We need to invest in addiction treatment programs to increase the number of detoxification units and enhance the full continuum of care, including step-down programs for individuals in need of treatment and those recently released from the criminal justice system. We also need to increase the availability of residential recovery houses and community-based care to provide safe and stable living environments.

- We need to develop a regional task force, co-chaired by the governors of all six New England states and New York, and their secretaries of health and human services, public safety, and education, to coordinate prevention efforts, encourage treatment, and increase the availability of counseling.
- We must treat mental health and addiction disorders with health care, not jail time by curtailing inflexible and often counterproductive mandatory minimum sentences for low-level, non-violent drug offenses to provide judges with wider discretion in sentencing and encourage diversion to care over incarceration.
- Within a month of taking office, I will freeze the expansion and new construction of state and county prisons, reinvesting these funds for rehabilitation and treatment facilities, including in detox beds, step-down units, and recovery centers.

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?

I believe we need to create a fairer tax system in our Commonwealth to alleviate the burden and financial stress facing low-income families. We can do this through the use of expanded exemptions, increasing the earned income tax credit, and expanding the property tax circuit breaker. I look forward to carefully reviewing the recommendations of the Tax Expenditure Commission and the Tax Fairness Commission, recently chaired by Representative Jay Kaufman, as we looking for ways to better align our tax code and tax policies to the needs of all citizens, particularly the most vulnerable.

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 vote against repeal of indexing the gas tax to inflation. There's a clear consensus throughout the state that losing \$1 billion dollars of funding would undermine our ability to build critical transportation projects that will improve our quality of life. I also believe it's irresponsible for my opponent, Republican Charlie Baker, to oppose a critical source of transportation funding without offering any plan to replace it.

b. Q4: Earned paid sick leave

I strongly support requiring businesses to provide earned sick time. In fact, in 2006, I was proud to be the first business owner in Massachusetts to testify in favor of earned sick time. My family

business, Grossman Marketing Group, has offered paid family leave for more than 25 years and it has been a critical ingredient in our company's success over the years.

Nearly one million people woke up this morning without a single hour of earned sick time all year, forced to choose between caring for a child with the flu and getting fired from their job. Earned sick time is not only the right thing to do; it's also smart business. I was proud to participate in the campaign to put the earned sick time question on the November 4 ballot, and I fully support the ballot question to provide workers with five days of earned sick time each year.