

Request for Applications (“RFA”)

Digital Health Sandbox Challenge #4 Primary Care Innovation Challenge

The Massachusetts eHealth Institute (MeHI) is seeking startups and entrepreneurs who are developing and validating digital health-based solutions that strengthen and sustain primary care in Massachusetts to compete in the fourth [Massachusetts Digital Health Sandbox Challenge](#). This challenge focuses on digital health innovations that address urgent issues in primary care, specifically in the areas of administrative burden, workforce burnout, and patient access. Challenge finalists will compete for \$300,000 in grant funding to support validation projects with [MeHI's Digital Health Sandboxes](#).

This challenge aligns with the goals of the [Massachusetts Primary Care Access, Delivery & Payment Task Force](#) established in 2025, co-chaired by the Health Policy Commission and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS). The Massachusetts Primary Care Access, Delivery & Payment Task Force is charged with designing equitable care and payment models, setting spending targets, and standardizing data reporting. Piloted projects and data collected from the Sandbox Challenge may inform workforce and policy recommendations that support the sustainability of primary care in Massachusetts.

Primary care is foundational to public health and the functioning of an equitable, cost-effective healthcare system. Accessible primary care correlates with better outcomes in prevention, chronic disease, and health equity. By providing a routine source of care and early disease detection and management, primary care improves overall health and reduces disparities, emphasizing its critical role for an effective and equitable health system. However, the share of primary care physicians in Massachusetts has continued to decline, dropping from 26.7% to 24.7% between 2014 and 2020. Over 50% of primary care physicians are over the age of 55, and the pipeline of new primary care providers is decreasing.¹ Fewer medical graduates are choosing primary care as a long-term career, and only 19-22% remain in the field after graduating.² Salary differentials between primary care physicians and specialists are one factor impacting the pipeline of new primary care providers. Those considerations may be even more impactful for medical graduates in Massachusetts, which has among the highest costs of living in the United States.³ These trends, combined with unstable reimbursement rates and increasing administrative demand, are leaving providers emotionally drained and financially burdened, resulting in them leaving the field.

Delays in accessing care have increased and the pressures are particularly abundant in underserved communities. Massachusetts residents in communities with lower median incomes were more likely to have no primary care visits, and more likely to have no care utilization at all, than residents in higher-income areas. A survey of Massachusetts residents in 2023 revealed that 66.1% of patients that utilized the Emergency Department that year did so because they could not schedule a visit with their primary care provider. Also in 2023, 41% of Massachusetts residents reported difficulty accessing care, a

¹ <https://masshpc.gov/publications/policyresearch-brief/dire-diagnosis-declining-health-primary-care-massachusetts-and>

² <https://www.chiamass.gov/assets/docs/r/pubs/2024/MA-PC-Dashboard-2024.pdf>

³ <https://masshpc.gov/publications/policyresearch-brief/dire-diagnosis-declining-health-primary-care-massachusetts-and>

significant increase from 34% in 2021.⁴ The inability to access primary care is impacting residents' health care, driving up overall costs for care, and increasing regional, racial, and economic disparities in health outcomes.

Despite primary care's proven value, it continues to be deprioritized in our health system investment. From 2017-2022, spending on primary care in Massachusetts grew by 11.8%, while spending on other health care services increased by 24.7%, and its share of commercial spending fell from 8.4% to 7.5%.⁵ Without targeted intervention, these trends will continue jeopardizing the stability and accessibility of primary health care.

Digital health innovations have the opportunity to address many of these challenges and can improve the demands on primary care providers, reduce administrative burdens, improve health care quality, and increase health care access for all. MeHI launched this Challenge to discover and spotlight digital health solutions that can address these urgent issues in primary care, specifically in the areas of administrative burden, workforce burnout, and patient access while addressing the unique needs of underserved, underrepresented, and undertreated populations. We take a broad definition of digital health and are looking for solutions at the intersection of healthcare and technology. Applicants must propose a new solution that is not yet widely commercially available.

Program Overview

The [Massachusetts Digital Health Sandbox Challenge Program](#) is designed to accelerate the development of digital health solutions that address key health care challenges in Massachusetts. The program is funded and administered by the [Massachusetts eHealth Institute \(MeHI\)](#) at the [Massachusetts Technology Collaborative](#).

MeHI puts out an annual call for applications to source, support, and validate solutions in defined areas. The first three challenges were [Innovations to Support Healthy Aging](#), [Innovations to Support Women+ Health](#), and [Innovations to Support Advancing Health Equity in Massachusetts](#). Through these three challenges, 28 companies from across the nation were provided access to cutting-edge research institutions, industry leaders, and funding opportunities. This fourth Challenge seeks solutions that address urgent issues in primary care, specifically in the areas of administrative burden, workforce burnout, and patient access.

Applicants from across the country can apply. MeHI staff will evaluate applicants and select up to 20 companies as semi-finalists. Applications will be reviewed on the proposed solution's uniqueness in the market, potential commercial viability, and ability to support the goals of the Primary Care Innovation Challenge. Semi-finalist companies will be asked to complete a Sandbox Matchmaking Survey to be shared with the cutting-edge research and development organizations from the [Massachusetts Digital Health Sandbox Network](#). MeHI will help match the semi-finalists with sandboxes to identify potential partners. Sandboxes and semi-finalists will meet during the month of February 2026 to discuss potential projects and identify research partners. After the meetings, the sandboxes will inform MeHI of which companies they could partner with for the program. MeHI will then select 8 to 10 companies to participate in the program. Each selected company will be matched with one sandbox.

Selected companies will participate in MeHI's Mass Digital Health Connects, a two-month series of

⁴ <https://masshpc.gov/publications/policyresearch-brief/dire-diagnosis-declining-health-primary-care-massachusetts-and>

⁵ <https://masshpc.gov/publications/policyresearch-brief/dire-diagnosis-declining-health-primary-care-massachusetts-and>

informative and interactive virtual workshops featuring prominent voices from across the ecosystem, including venture capitalists, state and federal policymakers, and leading researchers. Workshops include topics like secure clinical data exchange, mitigating bias and responsibly adopting AI, raising funding, working with public and private payers, navigating health systems, and an introduction to ecosystem partners. Learn more about Mass Digital Health Connects [here](#).

During this program, participants will also work with their sandbox matches to scope projects to test and validate their solutions to help bring them to market faster. MeHI will support participants in preparing detailed project plans outlining how the award funding would be used to complete the scoped sandbox project.

The program will culminate in an in-person, judged competition in June 2026 where participants will pitch both their product and their proposed sandbox project. Expert judges will recommend four winners to MeHI. Each winner's sandbox project will be completed by their sandbox partner with input and participation from the company. The projects are valued at **\$75,000** each, and the funding for each project will be paid directly to the Sandbox and **must be used to cover the Sandbox partner's fees**. This level of funding can typically cover user experience testing, access to cutting-edge lab facilities and subject matter experts, or a small unpaid pilot in a health care setting. **No funding will be provided directly to the winners.**

Challenge Areas and Solutions Sought

The following are examples of challenges in primary care that we believe can be addressed by digital health solutions. This is not an exhaustive list, and any applicants with ideas that address urgent areas in primary care are encouraged to apply.

All applicants should consider how their solution is targeting and supporting the unique needs of underserved populations, including supporting rural communities and addressing racial inequities, accessibility concerns, broadband access, and digital literacy, among others. Applications that effectively address these considerations will be prioritized.

1. Reducing Administrative Burdens
 - a. Platforms that streamline communication among team-based providers (MDs, NPs, PAs, RNs).
 - b. Platforms that support care coordination and communication between regional facilities to improve the efficiency and sustainability of rural health care facilities.
 - c. Tools to reduce time spent on scheduling, credentialing, billing, prior authorization, and documentation.
 - d. AI-powered clinical scribing tools.
2. Supporting the Primary Care Workforce
 - a. AI-powered documentation tools to reduce after-hours workload.
 - b. Technology to enable flexible care delivery models.
 - c. Wellness platforms and other solutions designed to support clinician's mental health.
3. Improving Patient Access

- a. Tools to address cultural, geographic, language, and digital access barriers to health care.
- b. Tech solutions that increase access for Medicaid patients or community health center users to health care.
- c. Care navigation and provider-matchmaking solutions for underserved populations.

Benefits to Participants

While only the top four solutions in this Challenge will receive grant funding to complete their sandbox projects, all participants will benefit from the program. Benefits include:

- Connect with key partners in the Massachusetts digital health ecosystem through the Mass Digital Health Connects Speaker Series
 - Understand the digital health funding landscape in MA
 - Learn about and connect with leaders in related, key industries in MA
 - Hear from experts about how to navigate and work with health systems and payers
 - Gain an understanding of other programs and resources in MA that are aimed at supporting digital health startups
- Accelerate time from R&D to production
 - Benefit from cohort learning
 - Work with experts to assess your testing needs
 - Meet with sandboxes to understand the research and testing opportunities
 - Partner with a sandbox to scope a detailed validation project
- Gain Funding Access
 - \$75,000 in sandbox funding each for the top four companies
 - Receive pitch prep services to be better prepared for investor meetings

Timeline

RFA Release: Friday, October 3, 2025

Information Session: Thursday, October 30, 2025

Final Application deadline: Thursday, December 18, 2025

Finalists selected: Friday, March 13, 2026

Kickoff meeting: Friday, April 3, 2026

Virtual Speaker Series: Fridays in April and May 2026

Pitch Prep: April and May 2026

Final Pitch Event: Week of June 1st 2026

The kickoff meeting and speaker series will be virtual events hosted over Zoom. The final pitch event will be an in-person event in Massachusetts. All finalists must be prepared to attend the event in person. The date for the final event is subject to change.

TERMS

Applicants are cautioned to read this RFA carefully and to conform to its requirements. Failure to comply with the requirements may serve as grounds for rejection of an application.

Any and all responses, applications, data, materials, information and documentation submitted to MassTech in response to this RFA shall become MassTech's property and shall be subject to public disclosure. As a public entity, MassTech is subject to the Massachusetts Public Records Law (set forth at Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 66). There are very limited and narrow exceptions to disclosure under the Public Records Law. If an applicant wishes to have MassTech treat certain information or documentation as confidential, the applicant must submit a written request to MassTech's General Counsel before submitting the materials. The request must precisely identify the information and/or documentation that is the subject of the request and provide a detailed explanation supporting the application of the statutory exemption(s) from the public records cited by the Respondent. If the General Counsel approves the request, the applicant shall clearly label the relevant information and/or documentation as "CONFIDENTIAL" in the application. Any statements in an application reserving any confidentiality or privacy rights that is inconsistent with these requirements and procedures will be disregarded.

This RFA, as may be amended from time to time by MassTech, does not commit MassTech to select any applicant, award any contracts, or pay any costs incurred in submitting the application. MassTech reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to withdraw the RFA, to engage in preliminary discussions with prospective applicants, to accept or reject any or all applications received, to request supplemental or clarifying information, to negotiate with any or all qualified applicants, and to request modifications to applications in accordance with negotiations.

MassTech may provide reasonable accommodations, including the provision of materials in an alternative format, for applicants with disabilities or other hardships. Applicants requiring accommodations shall submit requests in writing, with supporting documentation justifying the accommodations, to the Program Associate. MassTech reserves the right to grant or reject any request for accommodations.