



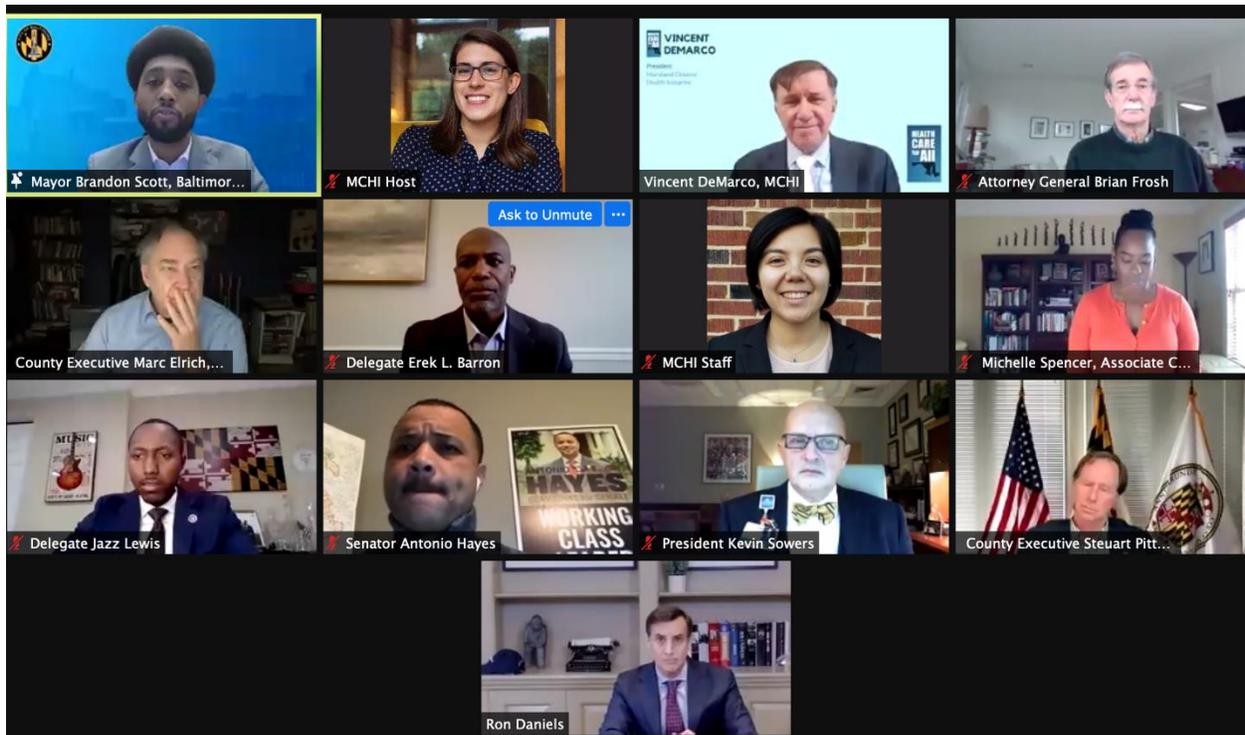
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Johns Hopkins Institutions Endorse Major Initiative to Expand Health Care in Underserved Communities

Legislative initiative would increase sales tax on alcohol to generate significant new resources for communities with disparate health outcomes across Maryland



Johns Hopkins Institutions, which includes Johns Hopkins University, the Johns Hopkins Health System and The Johns Hopkins Hospital, [today endorsed](#) a Maryland legislative initiative to establish Health Equity Resource Communities (HERC) across Maryland that will receive significant new funding to address longstanding health care disparities and bring new resources to underinvested communities across the state.

Under the proposed legislation, areas with poor health outcomes can become HERC communities and be able to compete for grants, tax incentives and health care provider loan repayment assistance to increase access to high-quality care and ultimately reduce health inequities by race, ethnicity, disability, and geographic location.

Funding for the Communities, as well as new programs to address substance use and mental health disorders, will come from a one penny per dollar increase in the state alcohol beverage sales tax.

“The Health Equity Resource Communities legislation is a critically important strategy to provide new resources to Maryland communities that lack adequate access to health care. For far too long, far too many of Maryland’s citizens have borne the unfair burden of racial, economic, and health disparities, especially in Black and Latinx communities,” said Johns Hopkins President Ronald J. Daniels. “This is a timely, research driven measure that will help expand access to high-quality health care and that has the potential to reduce alcohol-related problems for so many in communities across our state.”

“The Johns Hopkins Health System is committed to ensuring people in underserved communities can receive the health care they need,” said Kevin W. Sowers, president of the Johns Hopkins Health System Corporation and executive vice president of Johns Hopkins Medicine.

Maryland Citizens’ Health Initiative has worked across the state to build support for this legislation, and more than 250 labor, faith, business, health, and community organizations have also signed on in support ([Logo Flyer](#), [Full List of Members](#)).

“Johns Hopkins’ endorsement is a major boost to our legislation, and we salute President Daniels, President Sowers and their teams for joining us in this initiative,” said Sen. Antonio Hayes (Baltimore City), the lead Senate sponsor of the legislation. “Hopkins has been a leader in developing and supporting innovative approaches to improving community health care.”

“We are pleased at the support this initiative is receiving from community groups across Maryland and now from Johns Hopkins, one of the world’s pre-eminent public health institutions,” said Del. Erek Barron (Prince George’s), the lead House sponsor of the legislation. “We urge the General Assembly to embrace this legislation and begin to address disparities in health care resources.”

“Marylanders are focused on making our state more equitable, and a basic principle is that everyone should have access to high-quality, affordable health care, no matter where they live,” said Del. Jazz Lewis (Prince George’s), a co-sponsor of the legislation. “Our bill is a smart way to funnel new resources to improve access to care in areas that have for too long suffered without it.”

The Communities will be modeled after the successful 2012-2016 Health Enterprise Zones (HEZ) Program, which increased access to health resources, improved residents’ health, reduced hospital admissions, and created cost savings as shown by studies conducted by researchers at Johns Hopkins including Dr. Darrell Gaskin, Michelle Spencer, and Dr. Roland Thorpe. Unlike the HEZ pilot which ended after five years, money raised for the Health Equity Resource Communities would go directly into a dedicated fund for the program to help ensure longevity.

The legislation would increase the alcohol sales tax by one penny per dollar, with some of the new revenue dedicated to the Health Equity Resource Communities initiative. An increase in the

alcohol tax itself will also promote public health and lower health care costs. Research found that the last increase in the alcohol tax in Maryland, in 2011, led to a reduction in underage drinking, binge drinking, driving under the influence, and sexually transmitted infections. Proceeds from the alcohol tax increase would also be used to strengthen programs to address substance use and mental health disorders.

“We couldn’t be more excited that the Johns Hopkins Institutions have joined our efforts to create Health Equity Resource Communities,” said Vincent DeMarco, president of the Maryland Citizens’ Health Initiative (MCHI), the advocacy group leading the effort to enact the HERC initiative. “Their experts have looked closely at our proposal and believe it holds real promise for advancing equity in how health care is delivered in underserved communities in Maryland.”

A range of state and local elected officials are also working to pass the legislation this year.

“We need to act this year to expand access to health care in underserved communities,” said Maryland Attorney General Brian Frosh. “The COVID pandemic has exacerbated longstanding inequities in our state, and many people struggle to get access to the care they need. This legislation is an important step in rectifying these unacceptable disparities.”

“Too many communities in Baltimore and other areas of the state lack equitable access to the kind of health care all people want and deserve. This legislation will mean far more resources will be available to promote health care in all of our communities,” said Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott. “It’s a smart strategy that will help us transform health care in Maryland and address longstanding disparities in how resources have historically been allocated.”

“Montgomery County is committed to improving access to health care across the state, and I urge the legislature to support this measure,” said Montgomery County Executive Marc Elrich. “Adding a penny per dollar to the alcohol tax is a sensible way to generate revenue to support an expansion of health care and will help reduce alcohol-related issues that hurt our families and communities.”

“As we battle to overcome the pandemic and support families in need, it’s vital that we make sure more Marylanders have access to health care that is high-quality and convenient,” said Anne Arundel County Executive Stuart Pittman. “The Health Equity Resource Communities is a strategic approach to getting resources into the areas that have the most need. We need to pass this legislation.”

County Executives Angela Alsobrooks of Prince George's County, Calvin Ball of Howard County, and Johnny Olszweski of Baltimore County could not attend the event but issued [statements of support](#) for the Health Equity Resource Communities proposal.